
THE DEATH OF THE AMERICAN DREAM
BY CHLOE LUCERO

To the old, of the new worlds worth
each age is a dream that is dying,
or one that is coming to birth
W.E.S.

Dedicated to
HST
'In token of my appreciation to his genius'

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Chloe Lucero

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Completely fictional, not at all true; based on things that didn't happen.

Lykaion Publishing
16055 SW Walker Rd.
Suite #165
Beaverton, Or 97006

First Digital Edition

ISBN: 978-0-692-31147-9

Chapter 1

Looking Through The Glass Wall

Caitlyn directed Maddy to the bus stop.

"I don't have fare." Maddy looked up at her like a lost puppy.

"You worry too much" she replied without looking at him.

When it finally arrived she showed the driver a couple of dirty old transfers and he waved them onboard "Com'on let's go." The marker said Flipsville. Maddy hadn't noticed.

It stopped, picked up more passengers, lurched forward leaving some behind and continued in this way.

Cat was wearing an olive green army field jacket, combat boots and a peppermint striped mini-skirt. She had bright pink hair with purple highlights and aviator shades.

"Fuck yeah, fuck yeah" Maddy said to himself finally getting into the groove of the trip.

"You can't fuck yeah your own fuck yeah" said Cat.

"I just did."

"You know you look really familiar."

"People tell me that all the time. I think I just have a familiar face."

"Deja voodoo man. Do you ever feel like you've known someone your whole life?"

Cat had a pin on her jacket, a zombie with wings.

The bus lurched on the road again and Maddy stiffened up in his seat as the bus vibrated down the road.

"Wait, where did you go to school?" Cat inquired.

All of a sudden the smile dropped from his face.

"Why" he said plainly, staring at her.

"Did you go to Vineyard?"

"Yeah, then Llewling and Rex Putnam."

"Frank?"

"How do you know my name?"

"Frank Daryl?"

"Holy shit!" Caitlyn punched him in the arm, hard.

"When did you start going by Maddy?"

"Maddox is my middle name, you know I always hated the name Frank."

Maddy and Caitlyn were born a few days apart around Halloween and had grown up together until Cat's parents split. She had gone from horse property to a subdivision and it killed her a little inside. A lot actually.

The bus lurched forward again and a man came to sit next to Caitlyn. She stared at him but left the bag next to her on the bench.

"Please make room for other passengers or get off my bus" the driver coughed on the intercom. Caitlyn reluctantly moved the bag and the man grinned.

When Cate was little she used to tell everyone they were going to get married when they grew up. Maddy had no idea at the time what this meant and was fine with it.

The guy was sort of staring at Caitlyn occasionally only looking up to leer at Maddy for a moment.

Maddy mad dogged him "what do you want?"

"You know you want it little girl" he said looking at Caitlyn. She bolted up and a folding six inch knife, the length of her palm, appeared from seemingly out of nowhere in her hand at the creeper's throat.

"You crazy Bitch!"

Without thinking Maddy socked the guy and now his face was bleeding. The bus lurched to a dead stop and the driver phoned the cops while people just watched like it was a TV show. Some of them grinned calmly while the old ladies made remarks to each other.

Caitlyn grabbed Maddy's hand and they pushed the doors open and ran into the street.

"Fuck! Fuck, fuck." Maddy started to panic.

"What?! I didn't do anything. That piece of shit was lucky I didn't kill him." Caitlyn pulled away.

"No!" Maddy pleaded. "This" he opened his coat to reveal a thirty-eight caliber nickle plated revolver tossing it into a dumpster.

Caitlyn followed suit with the bag sighing "freedom isn't free" when the donut-disco rounded the corner.

The cops pulled their guns and told the kids to put their hands on their heads and lay down.

The officers dug their knees into shoulders and handcuffed them before setting them up against a hurricane fence while cops ran ID's and interviewed their new stars.

"Any warrants, needles we should know about?"

"No, not that I know about." Maddy choked.

"What's going on under your sleeves there?"

"Fuck." Maddy muttered darkly again, he had been carving the name of a band into his arm earlier.

"So, what happened today Cat?" A female officer asked. Caitlyn apparently was on a first name basis with the cops.

The male officer chuckled to his cohort "Just a family tradition eh?"

The other officer didn't respond.

In the back of the squad car they were driven around until the officers found a facility with open beds. The sign said Millhaven.

Because Maddy was now a suicide case and Caitlyn already had a record they were booked as mental holds instead of inmates. Yay.

Jailhouse

Dressed in scrubs and playing with coloring books Caitlyn was asking someone to tell her a story.

"He's the best" she confided to Maddy.

All the patients were relatively unique. Maddy wondered what his particular 'talent' was.

There were two phones freely available to the patients. The sad thing was nobody in there had anybody they could really call. If they did have someone in their lives that cared they probably wouldn't be there in the first place.

One man was explaining to no one in particular about how "outside the bubble time is the engine".

"Oh my god" Maddy thought. It was his first time in the nut-house, that he could remember. Honorary first timer for life.

"Yes tell us a story William" a loopy biker guy who was covered with tattoo's put his arm around a teenager with a shaved head and no boobs.

"Tell me what the fuck we're doing here?" Maddy asked Cait.

"No you're not!" The bald person said laughing at Maddy.

"You are old father William" the bald teen cried. "I live with my grandma, she gets real mad I won't wear dresses or grow my hair out. I shaved it to piss her off and she freaked out and put me in here." He was only 17 and seemed more normal than anyone until medication time.

"The mind can only stand so much" Maddy remarked.

Her roommate started talking "Back in my day we did whatever drugs we could get. Drugs were just drugs; we were

just happy we were getting high. Now all you kids are drug snobs. Oh! It's rat-poison" he said in a mocking tone and started laughing.

"Shut up Roger" Caitlyn snarled. "Tell us the story William. Tell us."

"Feisty little bitch ain't she?" Roger said looking at Maddy.

"Roger!" Caitlyn whined.

William proceeded.

Once eons ago Kali had cheated the ferryman in the dreamtime when her husband died; paying with a counterfeit. "What is the difference?" she justified. "He is dead and only a superstitious native would believe such kribble-krabble" thereby damning her husband.

In an endless attempt to save her husband she would dream herself into the underworld until an answer came to her. Upon arriving she paid the fair, however this time with a magic penny. Waking to the living world her husband had been freed; however a strange thing was happening in the living world. Chaos began to reign on Earth. That night she resolved to return and find out why.

Upon her arrival there was no one to greet her.

"Very odd" she thought "even the Devil entertains."

The scene when she arrived at the river was chaos. Charon's boat had been overtaken by laughing damned. Although all there were doomed, apparently some more so than others. Those on the ship were safe so long as it kept floating. In Sheol time stopped and nothing ever rotted, including the boat.

Lost souls were piled over the shores and being devoured by Ammit, a half-crocodile, half-dog beast. They were piled so high a mass of writhing souls

scratched at the cavernous roof and the faintest glimmer of light was beginning to break through.

As she prepared to exit she heard unusual screams of pain; deep, guttural, terrifying howls. As she turned to see where the commotion was coming from she saw the devil hunched over on his knees with a naked pierced man shouting "Bite it you scum!"

The story teller casually stretched like a cat until he could stretch no more.

"Well they were both very unpleasant characters" Caitlyn said casually quoting from a book she was holding.

"Wait. Which two?" Maddy asked.

"Witch too?" Caitlyn said with an evil grin.

"That's enough! That's enough" the shift nurse shouted in the most soothing possible tone she could muster. Some of the patients were growing agitated by William's shouting, he'd become engrossed in the story.

"It's time for medication". Three large men who looked like off-duty moonlighting cops assisted the nurses. Two older women with an evil streak an inch wide and a mile deep measured out doses into tiny paper cups; powerful 'anti-psychotic' medications that seemed to only make the patients crazier by orders of magnitude were handed out.

"Don't you want some Caitlyn? They'll help you calm down." The nurse stocked only the newest medications and the best intentions.

"I'm fine."

Seeing what it did to the other patients Caitlyn declined. Within forty minutes most become catatonic or fixated on scratching moles off. They would piss themselves which made

it necessary to put them in their rooms afterward where it was all yellow stained PVC, linoleum and locked doors that smelled like quat.

"Are you sure dear? They are perfectly safe" she stated authoritatively with a sort of grandmotherly guilt trip.

"I already feel perfectly calm, but thank you" she said smiling her best LA smile. The older woman seemed both gravely offended and annoyed.

The nurse made notes on a clipboard stacked with papers which were occasionally accented with highlighter. "Very well, you will have to discuss this with the Doctor tomorrow."

"Drug free class of two thousand? More like free drugs for the class of two thousand" Caitlyn mumbled.

When the nurse laid on the guilt trip not only did Cat shrug it off with the grace of a water bound duck, it made her a little angry. She knew the look, the guilt, the expectations were only a cold trap.

Maddy had never been in a ward before but apparently Caitlyn was a regular and as the wardens walked off Cait changed the subject "We can get snacks in a little bit juice, popcorn, Zonka."

"Fuck yeah, I'm starving. What's Zonka? Isn't it that instant coffee from the 80's?"

"Decaf. They won't let us have caffeine or smoke anymore. It makes the patients too riled up. You doing ok?" Caitlyn said.

"Shit, I'd kill for a smoke right now."

"Shh! Be careful what you say. These people don't get jokes in here. You want to watch TV? The Little Foxes is on next" she said. The Flying Salzburg was on, a sixties's sitcom about a Brazilian doctor.

"Can we?"

"Yeah."

Cat sat down on a shitty armchair and Maddy scooted close to her.

"So what's up with your family?" Maddy asked.

"Do you remember when I used to have trouble sleeping after I moved?"

"Yeah?"

"After we moved my step-dad started taking care of me and my brother. You know how my brother got a paid ride to Ivy? Well, I always wanted to go to Yale but he said I never 'earned' it. When I began acting out and he just started telling everyone I must be schizo and when they tried put me on medication. I can hear him now 'When they start to makeup stories you know they've really gone.' It made me feel like a zombie. I ran until I was forgotten; free."

A cheerfully creepy mural was painted on the wall behind a locking TV cabinet. Bright greens and blues with a smiling sun and tree, something you might see in a nursery. This actually brightened Cats disposition. She had been to jails and this was, she hated to admit, slightly better.

It was lights out in fifteen minutes and being in the ward sort of let Caitlyn feel like a kid again, in both good and bad ways. The care contrasted with the coercion, at least it had a sense of familiarity to it.

"Okay you two. Lights out in ten, lets go."

Maddy took a deep breath and did his best to smile at Caitlyn while she turned to leave. "Will I see you tomorrow?" He asked.

"Yeah, maybe" she said concealing her pain with a smile, as if there was any other place to hide.

She went up to the nurses station which was a sort of bank tellers like window in a horseshoe shape, all pink Formica and Plexiglass. The nurses job, when not handing out medications was primarily taking notes; observing and commenting on the lives of the patients. You were watched twenty-four seven except in the shower. It was the sort of thing that could get to a person if they let it.

Cat tapped on the glass and a male night nurse opened the window. "Yes Cate?" He said with disarming calm.

"Could I have a radio? To listen to? It helps me sleep. I like to listen to Ghost."

"Sure Cate. You may check one out." Marking a piece of paper he handed a radio through the window to her.

Caitlyn twisted the dial until the familiar sound of Heart Spells Ghost radio came on backed by Peruvian pan pipes, the topic was alien abductions.

Sodium Halide bulbs from the parking lot cast a orange pall through the windows on everything in the room. It didn't help her sleep.

She liked to pretend the bumper music had special messages just for her. That's why they called her crazy but she didn't feel crazy; just lonely, and maybe a little hungry.

Maddy sighed and rolled in bed in the next hall thinking of her hoping for a miracle.

Tears fell from her red eyes.

During the commercial break the host station broke through with an announcement "We have just received word the President has been shot. We will keep you updated as we learn more about this shocking development."

Caitlyn drifted off to sleep and had a strange dream. *They were picking up trash off the Redwood Highway when a blond woman beckoned them up a dirt road into the forest. When they got there people were loading inside a bus with Bob & Rita Marley. They were evacuating a forest fire. They drove to a strange house for safety near the river, however it had become swollen and the house would soon be swept away by the rising waters. Caitlyn's room was upstairs. It had two secret rooms one of them was an office, there was a trap door under the floor.*

A bed was placed over the hole and with the pull of a cord the sleeper would tumble into a basement with another hole, a manhole, or submarine type cover, which led to a dank scary bomb-shelter for a hundred year war.

The thought of it sent shivers down Caitlyns spine. A nice old man was telling them he was sorry "don't worry about me." They had to go. Downstairs a woman told them to stay, things seemed calm but the house was dead. It felt wrong somehow. As they were leaving Caitlyn looked up at her friends from a hole in the ground. She couldn't move and her friends couldn't hear her. They were getting ready to leave.

Just then she was back in her childhood neighborhood, at night. The porches were lit up and decorated. It was Halloween, little goblins roamed the streets knocking on empty doors. She looked for shelter, he found the house but it was different. It was an old hotel from the eighteen hundreds. A long carpeted staircase led to a series of bizarre rooms each numbered with rickety ancient doors. She went to hers and a woman greeted her. A witch. Up the stairs, the top floor, a nearly vacant room with a few posters, peeling paint, old rotten wooden floors. A mattress and a sleeping bag. An ashtray on the floor. It was Thabius her first, best goth friend "Hi" she smiled. A train rumbled past the window. It looked like it would go straight into the apartment.

Caitlyn felt the floor boards buckle and crack underneath her.

She woke up drenched in sweat. All she could remember was two kids, angels in the bushes pleading with her "don't go back."

She went to find Maddy. It was six am and breakfast would be served very soon. An orderly came in and took the radio.

A Hysterical Romance

He walked down the hall to find Cat and all the other patients eating canned peaches and Rice Puff cereal. Maddy sat down and a nurse led a very shy woman who would hardly make eye contact next to them. She moved like she was in restraints and shuffled up to the table.

"Why don't you sit with these two people Amy? They're very nice people."

"O-K."

"Florzine shuffle." Roger mumbled

She began to tell him about the bus, the rooms, Bob and Rita. He looked like a kid at Christmas the way his eyes lit up "I HAD THE SAME DREAM TOO, it made me sad."

They both decided not to tell anyone else. They were trying to get out after all.

A well dressed young man in his early thirties's approached the table with a clipboard and a lanyard; a backstage pass to the fruit factory. Obviously 'The Doctor'.

"The strange fruit doesn't fall far from the insanity factory" Caitlyn said under her breath.

"So Caitlyn I heard you refused meds again this morning. You know everybody here is really concerned about you. We want to see you get well but if you keep refusing treatment I don't see how that's going to happen. Can you tell me how you plan to get well without treatment?"

Caitlyn's blood started to boil but she did her best to hide it. Adding anger issues to her chart notes wouldn't help her get out any sooner. The only way out was to be perfectly cheerful and obedient, no matter what they threw at you. Re-education.

"It..." Caitlyn struggled for words when an older red headed woman, probably about twenty nine rushed The Doctor.

"Please, please I can't read my writing. I need something else. The meds are making me blind."

"Ok Sharon, we'll discuss this at another time, I'm helping other patients right now, can't you see that?"

The womans words became a stream of muted gibberish and she started quietly sobbing.

The Doctor looked back at the kids.

"Who is this Caitlyn? A new friend?"

"Um" Caitlyn smiled.

Across from them there was a woman on lithium talking to teddy bear she obviously thought was God.

"It's good to make friends isn't it? What's your name young man?" The Doctor looked at his charts pretending not to know. Maddy wasn't sure if he should shake his hand or punch him. Fortunately the Doctor resumed speaking before he had to choose.

"And how are you today Maddy? Any thoughts of suicide? Or harming yourself?" He felt like he was in second grade. It didn't matter how he felt. He knew there was only one right answer to this question. "No" he said plainly.

"We have a new treatment if you two are interested. The Government wants us to open up new research into lysergic acid trials. If things go well you two could be out of here and back to your regular lives within days."

"We pushed hard and got a special license. Now this is a big deal, you could be almost like heroes for your country. Would you like that?"

Caitlyn smiled.

"Now I know we've talked about this before Caitlyn but I'd like Maddy to answer for himself. It has an opposite effect on the brain compared to typical psychotic, I mean anti-psychotic medication. We think that by working through the brains dysfunction rather than resisting it we can radically shorten treatment time. By years even."

"Years?" Maddy said.

"Yes, you know once you're in here it's not like a regular sentence. You stay until you are well, however long that takes. If I make a recommendation to the Judge on Monday you could be free that afternoon."

Maddy did not know this. He knew his temper and the slightest upset could cause him to be put in restraints and forcibly medicated. He looked at Caitlyn and she nodded "Yes".

"OK" Maddy said.

"What's that?" said the Doc.

"YES." Said Maddy.

"Okay great. I'll have the nurses get the consent forms for you to sign and we can proceed this afternoon."

The Doctor made some notes with a purple novelty pen. Obviously a drug company giveaway, it said "Bund Family Laboratories" on it.

Sunlight was pouring in through the floor-to-ceiling windows where they ate. It looked like any typical office break room except it was filled with lunatics. Right.

To think he could have been out on the streets looking to buy a ticket, to "the show" and he just got VIP seats.

An orderly made notes about how much each patient ate as Maddy turned in his tray, a poison red apple untouched. The TV was black this morning.

A man was cleaning and made small talk "What happened to the cruise this weekend Doc? If they were paying me to go on vacation I wouldn't need this job."

"Too much work Jim."

"That's some work ethic you got."

"Sure thing, have a good one."

"Alright, you too."

Cat and Maddy walked back to the TV room. The Little Foxes, a cartoon about a family of thieving canines that lived in a vineyard was on DVD. Maddy grabbed the remote and turned up the volume.

All the cables for broadcast TV were disconnected this morning. On the screen one of the foxes was wearing a

bumble bee costume and scooping up baby bumble bee's. The show was too messed up to exist, but there it was, on TV.

"Medication" Nurse Hawthorne called out.

A nurse gave a stack of consent forms & privacy statements to Maddy and said "The Doctor said you've changed your mind about treatment. I'm glad your committed to getting well Frank."

It bothered Maddy to hear that name but he allowed it.

"We need you to sign some things Mr. Daryl. Caitlyn, since you've done this before we don't need your consent."

Caitlyn looked for Roger and when the two locked eyes Roger began screaming and pissed himself. It took two of the nurses to calm the other patients who began hooting while the orderlies lifted Roger from the ground.

Maddy looked for Caitlyn she was just sitting back down next to him.

Maddy whispered to Caitlyn "What the fuck just happened?"

"You'll see" Caitlyn tried to control her smile and shushed him "finish your paperwork."

Maddy had to keep from smiling too, feeling like he'd just gotten away with something but didn't know what.

There were no cameras in the med closet ostensibly because patients were never allowed in there. It seemed like a lapse in institutional procedure to him.

One of the orderlies came from behind the station and quickly locked the med room door. Only about ten seconds or less had passed by Maddy's estimation.

Caitlyn resumed watching cartoons as if nothing had happened.

He had no choice but to continue his paperwork as Caitlyn ignored him.

After a short while one of the nurses said "Are you two ready for the trials?"

They followed an elderly nurse and two large orderlies down into a basement Maddy was surprised existed.

The door, a nondescript beige number opened into a stairwell with a fire exit opposite the stairs. He leaned against it casually, it was locked. Probably by magnets. He recognized it was the same style as those used at his old school. Only the alarm would get the magnets turned off, Closing all the fire-doors; or in this case unlocking them.

As they started down the steps Maddy felt terrified. He felt like it was an execution, not a treatment. The nurse got a text "Two vials unaccounted for. Do you know WTF?"

Maddy read over her shoulder. Fuck Cait he thought. She's been found out.

"Excuse me, I have to go deal with something upstairs. The orderlies will show you to your rooms. I will be back shortly so that we may begin."

The orderlies unlocked two small white rooms with little barred windows looking out onto the plain hallway. Each room had a red electric typewriter and a bed with a stainless steel toilet next to it. No sink though.

"The microphones will start recording when the trial begins. Feel free to say whatever comes to mind. You won't be judged negatively for anything you say. It is just an experiment and

we want to observe you in a relaxed state. The test will last approximately 8 hours from the time you begin. Good luck."

"Good luck?" Maddy whispered.

The orderlies walked out of the hall and up the steps locking the door behind them.

Standing in the hall "what the fuck.." he started and before he could finish the halfbaked thought Cat interrupted him "The President was killed last night."

"What! Are you serious?"

"Well they said he was shot, I don't know."

"Shit."

"Here look" Caitlyn showed Maddy a vial that was clearly marked with a small tab: LSD-25 NowDouse Labs.

"Shit dude. The nurse that's where she went, the text said two vials missing. Ugh. You fucked us!"

"Calm down Maddy. I only took one. Do you think I'm stupid?"

Maddy laughed, "Wait are you..?"

"The mad doser? No, I'm not mad, I forgive you Maddy. Just don't do it again." She palmed the vial off to him, it was warm.

Just then the lock to the hallway rattled and Maddy slipped the small glass vial, about an inch tall with a little black plastic screw cap, into the bun of his pony-tail.

"Okay, are we ready to begin?" The nurse said all smiles.

"Yes" said Maddy ever the picture of calm, cool and collected.
"But I have a question, if I may?"

"Go ahead Mr. Daryl." Maddy cringed again.

"What are the typewriters for?"

"These rooms used to be offices for the night interns. I guess no one ever removed them."

She handed Maddy and Caitlyn each a Dixie cup with green kool-aid and put about four drops in each one from a vial she delivered on a cart via dumbwaiter.

"I hate flying cargo-class but if it gets us out of here..." Caitlyn spouted off.

Maddy looked at Caitlyn before they were split-up.

"Okay" the nurse said trying not to hear.

Then in a turn of character just before she locked the doors on each of them she said "let's ride."

Maddy climbed onto the bed. The sheets rank of bleach and he sat in lotus position.

Probably within about thirty minutes, Maddy had guessed since there was no clock in the room; he begin to suffocate. He felt like he was suffocating and then he realized he didn't need to breathe. He tried not holding his breath but not breathing either. He just sat there and felt no urge to take in air. He knew it must be about supper time but he did not want to eat. There was a cricket somewhere in the room. He could hear it. He decided to try breathing again. It was the most powerful sensation. In through the nose, deep, hold it, and out, slowly through the mouth, Vedic technique. He felt the whole universe pause with his breathe and expand again. Expand as far as he could inhale. 'That's why we smoke,

practice.' All the action was in his head. 'In, hold it, steady out' "Yhee aaaah phoooo eeehh".

He felt himself get high with every breath. Maddy - was - trippin'. His thoughts became jumbled yet connected, linked in strange unexpected ways.

He tried to lay still but his body was aching. He wanted to run but there was nowhere to go. Not here, not now.

His brain felt like it was on fire or had been soaked in mouthwash. In a good way. Tingley and minty fresh. Germ free.

He inhaled again and thought of the cricket. Every time his thoughts even glanced at the thing it stopped. 'Fuckin', that's weird' Maddy thought. He was scared to hear his voice. Any words he said would not feel like his.

"Seriously, how the fuck..." the cricket went silent. Maddy focused on his breathing and tried to empty his mind.

It didn't work. He thought of Caitlyn. Well tried, any thoughts of him, her, their childhood all made Maddy confused and seasick. Like a word find of thoughts. Breathe in, out. Apparently sex was acceptable, it consumed his mind.

Thoughts of sex with Caitlyn he found no joy in. The cricket resumed briefly until Maddy turned his attention toward it. "Weird..." Maddy started to feel god like. Not god exactly, but a certain magical quality seemed to possess him. He felt omnipotent. If only briefly his will, became the will of the universe with the instant of thoughts. He remembered bible school "In the beginning there was the word and the word was with god and god was the word."

The damn cricket started again only to stop. Maddy felt like he had to learn instantly to control this new power or the world itself could collapse with a thought. He tried not to let fear enter his mind. Cool baby, be cool. Cleared mind; in, out. His brow trickled with drops of sweat. They rolled out onto his arm

and if he was really crazy he would have thought he could make them roll any direction with just a thought. As if the droplets were iron filings and his mind a magnet. He remembered his schools motto "Mind Moves Mass" Go Platipi! He grinned.

The Nurse had stolen the other vial. The Doctor knew too, he was in on it! They were all crazy! Fucking-Bonkers! Insane, and now he knew as well. This whole western world was all just a very twisted group, gone to the Higher-Ups. They had no fear of past, present or death. All just a game but with real consequences.

"Those twisted fucks" and the Doctors words "Now Jo-Jo." Wait. What? "Suicide?"

Things flashed faster until his mortal brain could no longer keep up.

The President, the shooting, the doctors, the nurse all a game, all knew. He also knew if he said anything they would keep him here forever or worse, and they were all in on it. It was too familiar.

Things started slowing down. His body ached now more than ever and his kidneys hurt. How much had they given him? He focused his eyes and forgot about his breathing. He looked at his arm.

'Fuck those Nazi's' he thought. Then, not a shake in his voice and clear as a bell "I quit" the only words he said aloud. Just then a face looked through the windows and a loud metal clang rang out. He tried to clear his mind of the strange and terrifying visions he just had.

The orderly unlocked the door but did not enter. There were handprints on the glass. He remembered the cricket. 'What about that fucking cricket' he thought. Maddy shook his head and tried not to grin. The nurse came in.

"We like it when you smile" she said with the warmth of a mother but it rang hollow. The typewriter had mysteriously disappeared. He decided not to mention it to the nurse. He was afraid someone would call him crazy.

The nurse came through the door and brought in a tray with an apple, a milk box and some cold cereal. Maddy wasn't hungry but needed a shower badly.

Suddenly the whole place exploded. Caitlyn grabbed Maddy's arm as the nurse and orderlies rushed up the stairs. Caitlyn pushed against the fire door which opened into blinding sunlight.

They rushed outside while the nurse and orderlies had forgotten all about them racing towards the frantic jabbering in the ward.

What had happened? Maddy had no time to dwell on these things as ash rose behind them breaking up the once blinding light and Maddy choked on it as they ran through a parking lot dotted with oaks, towards a waiting commuter train about a hundred yards away.

Chapter 2

A Civilized Home

Metal blasted from Maddy's boombox some song about a man who had come to kill a chicken and he heard his mother go into a apoplectic fit. "Oh my god" he groaned quickly wrapping his arm and put on a coat sighing to himself. Reaching under the bed his hand felt through a hole in the mattress for a gun locker. Unlocking the black steel box about the size of a large novel, his hand grabbed a shiny thirty-eight caliber revolver. Even though he knew better it was loaded. He holstered it grabbing a backpack and bolted down the stairs, the radio was still on.

"This is my house! My phone! No, no, no!" she would not.

The phone ringing downstairs had woke him on a couch surrounded by people talking loudly.

"Tell us the story of the Ship of Fools."

"Oh yes please?"

"In 2012 a post-nuclear apocalyptic future wasteland: One man with thick blond hair and a kilt..."

That's not how it goes tell it right!" Someone exclaimed.

"I'll tell it" said Maddy confidently wiping the sleep from his eyes "as best I can remember. It was told to me as a lullaby many years ago. The thoughts are broken but I will do my best." Everyone sat enraptured.

"Cat sat on a nasty old couch in the warm Anarchist Union building where steam had gathered on the large plate glass windows facing the street. We had just finished doing our first LSD trip the night before; or was it day? Hard to tell how much time had passed and no one had a watch anyway. We had just gotten off of the TrEx, Transit Express and were walking down waterfront towards Burnside St."

"What do you mean?" he asked

"I am embarrassed to be from here."

"Everybody is embarrassed about where they came from a little" Maddy said cutting her off again.

"No, it's more than that, something deeper" she said turning down a narrow passage. "Like ok for example, when I was younger I knew this kid whose parents wouldn't let him believe in Santa Clause because they said it was pagan sun worship but the pagan kids don't get Santa either because their parents are all busy dancing naked around campfires during the holidays and, and, godblessit! It never stops raining!"

"Thanksgiving is a masonic holiday. What's your point?"

Cat started hyperventilating.

"It's just a state of mind." Maddy replied.

"Fuck you" said Cat blowing snot out of her nose onto the sidewalk.

The sidewalks were damp and the grass on the left was sandy and bare where it wasn't all muddy. To the right the Willamette river, a superfund site. It had been the dump for toxic industrial waste for the last hundred and sixty or so years. There were people swimming in it. It drained into the Columbia which is host to radioactive salmon, a leftover from nineteen fifties nuclear experiments upriver. "Lovely" the President called it when he visited during a campaign stop.

We walked under the Burnside Bridge past a group of gutter punks, crusty kids, train-hoppers and anarchists who shower about once or twice a year. One held a sign that said "free to loving home".

"Oi?! Hey what's up brother?" A stubbled dude with a nasty knit cap stretched out his hand. "How are ya doin'?" He took a

long swill, about a third of a pint from a bottle of red liquor and finished it. "You guys spare any change?"

"Uh, We don't have shit dude."

"Well come 'ere."

Sitting down the kids introduced themselves. Two dogs, four kids and their 'uncle'. He packed a bowl of some amazingly stinky, sticky weed into a glass pipe with colored swirls and handed it to Cat. A greasy man in sweatpants with glasses and an anxious look in his eyes walked past the kids and their dogs started barking fiercely.

"We're on vacation for a while, normally we live in San Francisco. This is Presh." He said pointing to one of the American Staffordshire Terriers. "What's your name?"

Introductions were made and the bowl was roasted. Cat sat down facing a billboard for Coca-Cola. Maddy got curious "Where do you guys get your money, like how do survive?"

A girl spoke up. "Space" she said casually. "The spaceship which takes us wherever we need to go."

Maddy had absolutely no idea what to make of the response and tried to forget asking the question. They laughed at him.

"Hey Cat, what's black and blue and sits in the corner?"

"You guys he's still tripping leave him alone."

"No shit? You never tripped before dude?"

Maddy looked at her "Cat?"

"We're TFH."

"Who?" Maddy said sincerely.

"Too Fucking High." Everybody started laughing and Cat just looked at Maddy lovingly.

"Testing for Hippies." A cute spritely woman answered.

"Here." The older dude fished around in his bags and pockets for a minute and held out his fist palm down. Maddy outstretched his hand and got a handful of wet, soggy, slimy; "ew" slug things? Half rotten mushrooms. They were slimy and blackish blue but still firm.

"We picked them a few days ago on the way here from the coast. We can't sell them, they're going rotten. Eat 'em." Maddy smiled and downed the mushrooms gagging on the taste. "Thanks for the head adjustment."

"Fuck this. Let's get the fuck out of here." Cat said to no one in particular.

The bowl was finished.

"Godamnit it's cold" one of the women said.

"Yeah we need to get going. See ya guys." Cat said standing up with a half wave.

Walking past the Skidmore fountain a newspaper box showed men in uniform saluting while a plaque was put up and haggard bastards formed lines up and down Burnside to get into the missions for that evening. For many decades people have rightly referred to this place as "Skid Row" and the kids walked into another state of mind.

Crossing the busy street and breathing car exhaust we were dead center in the middle of a city with millions of people.

Maddy started ranting and complaining that “the stupid buses in this town never run on time there is always some embarrassing construction project that obstructs the route and then you're at a dead stop...” trailing off.

“Will you stop bitching?!” Cat looked pissed. Maddy had never seen her this way before.

“You want me to leave? Fine, maybe I'll go stay at the mission or this place” she said pointing to row of doors serving as a dream buffer.

They walked in to the Anarchist Union in the United Clothing building from out of the rain and plopped down on the couch where Ellis Dee, a troll with dreadlocks down to his knees staffed the place even when he wasn't working. He also sometimes could be seen at the All Free Cascadia office.

Cat leaned in close to Maddy “I've always wondered if he was a narc just because the way he seems to pop up everywhere. It's weird. That and his crew seem to wreck everything they touch.”

“Funny thing about the movement Cat is that saboteurs and well intentioned activists are really, really hard to tell apart some days.” Ellis said walking up spooking them from behind.

“Oh, hey.”

“Hey Cat, who's your friend?”

“Nobody.”

“We're watching the Mayday picnic turn into a police riot on the news. I can't go because I have a park exclusion.”

“Oh shit I forgot! Damn, that was going to be fun.” Said Cat.

On the TV from a news helicopter we could see cops on horseback corner a group of black clad hippies with the news feed stating "protesters disobey official police orders to disperse." Every exit was blocked and when someone tried to break through they were maced and beaten by a swarm of black clad troopers when the feed was interrupted and it switched to commercials.

"Damn Portland is crazy..." said Maddy thinking aloud.

"I know, this shit gives me a boner. I wish I was out there kicking those cops asses!"

"That's not what I meant." Maddy said.

"I thought we were in LA?" Caitlyn said lost in a daydream.

Ellis Dee just stared. "Eh, whatever. It's all the same scene. I'm going to make some coffee."

"I was thinking about the story, Ophelia and Chloe is it? They were raised together like brother and sister but from different families, orphaned and brought up by a pack of wolves."

"You were raised by wolves?" He asked Cat.

"No, I was raised by a pack of goth's and gutter punks. Same difference though."

"I need to go up to Eagle Falls tree sit to make a supply run."

"Oh my god. I've been wanting to go to one of those! Can I come with?" she asked Maddy.

"Sure."

"Do you have a place to land tonight?" Cat asks.

"No, actually."

"You can come home with me, but we'll have to stop by my friends studio to pick up some things and you can meet my roommates. We're supposed to meet them at coffee time for a ride."

"When's coffee time?" Maddy asked.

"If you have to ask you'll never know" Cat said coolly.

"Besides even though we're ready to go - believe it or not, I want to hang out a while."

Breath's hit Moon Explorer played on the radio in the background. "Live and direct your community radio station KBUD."

Anax walked in and plopped down across from Cat and Maddy. Anax was in a punk band called Police Riot.

"Oh hey. Didn't you say they started KBUD?" Maddy asked.

"The D is silent. Just like in Ellis' name" responded his girlfriend.

"Wait. How are you supposed to pronounce it?" Maddy said.

"Ee, it's French. How did you think?"

"Nevermind."

"Hey you guys. How's it going Cat?" Before anyone could answer he asked another question. "There's a show next door tonight. Do you want to come by? I just finished silk screening a set of posters."

The Anarchist Union sold bumper stickers and t-shirts to pay the rent.

Anax produced posters and things at the Marshall Art Studio, near the Crack Press.

Maddy picked up a coloring book with a picture of a clown in a cowboy hat holding a rubber chicken. Putting it down he looked up and saw the clown. His shoes were half boot, half sneaker.

Outside the rain had stopped and the skies had cleared. There was a cardboard box full of empty beer bottles and plastic wrappers, crap. "Damnit. I clean it every morning but it keeps on showing up!" Cat picked up the box and dropped kicked it into the street and started laughing.

"This town is embarrassing" Cat said.

Inside the old brick building where Anax lived someone practiced a skate trick in the open space over a stencil of a syringe full of little tiny floating TV's. It was the nineties so it wasn't a cliché yet.

A woman went into the open kitchenette to stir a pot. She had tight faded black jeans and a torn, sewn back up with dental floss frankenstyle rock shirt, long pretty bangs and the rest of her head was shaved.

Some folks in the audience weren't watching the show "We should rent a van to host a massive street party and put a PA in it. We can just drive around until they arrest us."

"There will be so many people dancing around the van they won't be able to get close enough!"

It smelled like old wood and books like a library. A sexy musk scent permeated everything along with the scent of paint thinner and beer. Downstairs Anax was using an angle grinder as a rhythm device standing on a pile of dirt. Someone was using rebar to play percussion and a sixty year old air raid

siren was being used as an amp speaker. "After the war the rats and the roaches, we'll crawl from the wreckage and eat all their corpses." An old mortar round tied to a winch which was dangling above a pile of glass and TV phosphorous.

Divine, Right?

After the show Cat asked "What's with all the dirt on the floor over there?"

"It's the Shanghai tunnels." Anax replied.

"No way? That little brick archway connects to the tunnels?"

All of these buildings had basements and they contained ancient boilers.

It creeped him out a little bit. Anax continued "It filled with trash and we were trying to reduce the rats by cleaning."

"This place is like a tomb." Cat remarked.

Now it creeped him out a lot.

Cat thought it was cool as fuck. They lost track of time. Above the door someone had written "It's always later than you think". It tripped the kids out and after pausing they went upstairs.

"Do you know what time it is?" Cat inquired.

"Coffee time?" Maddy responded with obnoxious glee. "Do you want to come Anax?" he asked, excited to be with his new friends.

"Yeah let me lock up and we can take my truck."

They walked out of the brick building and packed themselves away into the truck like sad, wet, velvet rag clowns.

A billboard in black and yellow said "Make Portland Weirder".

Inside the truck it smelled like old socks and cigarettes. They found themselves in a labyrinth, driving in circles around a rose bush.

"Fuck this!" Anax said and grabbing the wheel jerked the massive truck over the abutment and straight into the round-about. Cat started laughing as they went forward out through to the other side.

"Damn that was awesome."

"Something about driving straight through a labyrinth in a giant truck feels so American" Anax said.

If he wasn't a Mopar expert he could at least be called an enthusiast, a trait he shared with Cait.

"I love this four hundred forty cubic inch engine. It's got a raised manifold, ported heads and hardened seats. It's a high compression, quadra carbed, super charged, free floating one ton truck."

No one had understood a word he had said and they simultaneously started to wonder if he might be insane.

Asylum Ave.

They approached Banana Bear's and piled out. A sign on the register said "Coffee should be black as hell, strong as death and sweet as love."

The rain on the windows wiggled and pulsed and seemed to be alive.

"Man these are some good drugs."

"What?" asked Cat.

"The mushrooms I ate." He paused while he tried to think of tense. "Oat?"

"Don't hurt yourself" she said laughing.

Warmth emanated from the smokers outside in a row before the glass windows. The steel tables were stuck in the concrete. Cups rose with the scent of cinnamon, nutmeg, clove mixed with exotic incense, copal maybe. Caitlyn walked through the narrow passage down the long hall filled with sumptuous chairs and couches, through the bookcase into the smoking room.

A man named Skinner Kobb was talking with a group of freaks in the corner.

"It was all on a need to know basis. I don't need, so I don't know." The older guys burst out in laughter.

A skinny guy in with amazing hair said "Nothing can be known, not even this." emptying a pipe into an ashtray. Austin wore slicked black hair and a black jacket lined with red velvet. He was absolutely dashing in an imperceptibly imperfect way. He poured himself some more coffee from a carafe and added milk which sat on the table in a baby bottle and dribbled out through the nipple when it was turned upside down.

"Hey, what's up?" Austin asked looking up at the two new revelers. "My friend was just telling me about this play, Spring Awakening. Have you met Rose and Thabius yet? They used to run a finishing school for wayward boy's."

Rose was thumbing a deck of Tarot cards.

Maddy couldn't tell if they were fucking with him or insane or what.

Sitting between two small tables in the dimly lit room they drank coffee that could almost stand against coke on it's best days.

Faces of earlier times graced the walls in a mural, gin drinkers caught in moments of ecstasy.

They eyed Maddy curiously.

Suddenly Maddy asked "Does anyone know what twenty three is, er means?" There was muttering and eyes. A smile.

"There is no number." Anax said cynically.

"I saw it at the University of Washington campus in Seattle painted all over a path with steps." Austin, the skinny man spoke "You see it when synchronicity happens. Who are you?"

Maddy decided instantly he liked him. "Maddy".

"No. From now on you are Dr. Fabulous."

Maddy started to wonder what they were talking about before they walked in but didn't say anything.

Thabius was tall, fat and had long hair pulled back into a bun. He was wearing some kind of prairie dress. It was weird. He sat next to Rose who was dressed like a gay space pirate, or eighties business lady. Her hair was in pig tails with bright yarn extensions and was wearing platform boots and a sparkley silver grey top underneath a jacket with shoulder pads. She moved to the states when she was six from Jamaica and spoke with a SoCal accent.

"How was the Dancing Mummies show last night?" the man in the prairie dress asked Cat.

A dude wearing a thick hooded sweatshirt came up from behind him and whispered to Maddy "Hey you should go to this Halloween party bro, I think you might like it." He gave him a name and said it was in the book while Cait continued talking with Thabius.

"Awesome. I met Maddy there, he's going to come home with me."

"He's cute."

"Cat remember what happened last time you adopted a stray?" Rose said in a motherly tone.

"I promise I'll take care of him this time" she pleaded, blushing trying to conceal a smile.

They used to live together in Los Angeles before Caitlyn moved to The Palace.

"Austin was just trying to convince us that the Blue Brau beers logo is derived from some cock & bull story about raves."

He tried to defend himself "He said they had a tradition, they would dance up and down this mountain all night until the sun came up."

"Sounds like Rich." Kobb replied. "He used to be famous."

"Sounds like the pow-wow at the end of the world." Rose was all business.

"He even showed me his tattoo, a blue ribbon on his ankle."

"What's the pow-wow at the end of the world?" Maddy asked.

"Some shit I just made up or an Indian told me when I was almost passed out drunk on the Dirty Dog. I don't care to remember."

"The Dirty.."

"The bus." Austin said rolling his eyes inconspicuously.

"Well the version I heard the world was ending so everybody got together for a big party. They went well through the night and into the next day..."

Was he serious? He was beyond serious.

Thabius looked over at Maddy and poured him a cup of coffee from the carafe with a slip of the wrist as he set the pot down.

Kobb pretended not to hear and continued talking to Austin about whatever it was before we walked in.

"When I was flying helicopters during Vietnam I signed up to make extra money on the weekend doing drug testing for the government. They called it aviation medicine. They didn't even tell us what they were giving us." Kobb started laughing casually "I'm not sure they knew."

"The bund was active until the war started and then they went underground. After the war became of the future was communications the scientists front deadman were given visas by my of the friends who worked for Central Educational Authority."

"It's always the CEA" Rose said taking a drag of her long skinny cigarette leaving a pink lipstick stain.

Instantly Maddy started doubting himself. "What the fuck did they just say he thought?" It scared him and then he remembered the mushrooms.

"I don't do drugs, anymore" said Thabius. He used to live in New York in the eighties before moving to LA to escape his incredibly wealthy, powerful family. He single handedly started a Goth scene wherever he went.

Kobb took a sip of water and spit ice cubes back into the cup. Rose petals revolved in it. "Some of us liked it, we found it strangely liberating. That's when we started the revolution."

Everyone became quiet.

"Revolution?"

"The Psychedelic Revolution. Revolt of the Lab Rats."

Kobb popped out a vial of ginseng and downed it.

With the exceptions of Kobb and Austin everyone at the table looked sick. Cat looked at her nuncle and leaned in to Maddy "When he got back they started touring together."

"You were in a band?" Maddy asked excitedly. Finally something he could relate to.

"Yeah, Kobb and his buddy are the ones who started the Litmus tests."

Suddenly Maddy was amped. He had no idea he was sitting with his idols and tried to act cool. It felt like sitting with his best friends.

"He loves music, even though he doesn't know what it means when I say..." Caitlyn was interrupted when a man with a guitar as big as he was and a kazoo strapped around his neck walked in and winked at Maddy.

The man in a firefighters jacket was singing from a bible wrapped in the American flag oblivious to the conversation. He had just rushed inside from the rain. It was pouring hard.

Jack's in the attic

Leo's in the zoo

Cleo is my concubine

How the fuck are you?

I forget the cradle, I forgot the nest

Tell me about the Black Star Line, before I take my rest

Johnny's got a Dark Star, Lassoed to a horse

Grandpa's got a fool-proof system for betting of course

Myra's in the kitchen laughing like a loon

Leo said to Cleo take your time, they'll be here soon

Meanwhile Superman is barking, howling at the moon

Captain Salt got up, stood and looked around

He said fuck this, your all nuts

He grabbed a beer and sat back down

He was obviously his own drummer and poured himself a cup of coffee from the carafe.

"Give me some milk!" He mumbled.

"Hey Rich!"

"Hey fellas" he said.

"Why are you out there busking? Kobb said you were rich and famous?"

"Rich? Man I thought you were broke" said Austin

He pointed to left side of his chest, "Rich... I'm Rich." Maddy thought he might be disabled and didn't say anything.

Rich Robbin lived with Weezy near the Palace and studied folk music. He was an artist. A moody, socially awkward Midwestern kid. He'll play anywhere for the price of bus fare. "Fuck it. I need to go home and write. I'll see you when you're in front of my face. Here's your keys Mr. Peter."

"What man?"

Now sanctified by the high muckity muck Kobb said "Let's get down to business. Here check out this new toy Gadget just sent us" without missing a beat. "Gadget is working the new particle smasher they built in Georgia. They were having problems blowing up the real small ones so they had to call in the experts."

"Georgians?" Cat asked dumbfounded.

Austin straightened his tie, despite the name he was anything but country. "Precisely" he said. "Rednecks, from an early age they..."

"Shut-the-fuck-up" Rose howled. "Austin you're fired." She had been telling people they were fired long before a TV show popularized the term.

"I'm leaving" Anax said.

"Oh. So early?" Maddy asked.

"Yeah. I uh, really need to go." He gave Maddy a look that seemed to say "Fuck you, if you're going to stay here."

"Oh. Uh see you Anax" Maddy Responded.

"Yeah, bye." Cat said.

"You were saying Austin?" Thabius invited him to continue clearly enjoying the frivolity.

"You know that rock T-shirt? The album with a pyramid and the rainbow?" Kobb asked.

Thabius sighed loudly. "If this is going to turn into some hippy shit I'm leaving" he said in a very serious tone.

"Filthy hippies" Rose hissed.

Gadget lived in the woods with some of their old mutual buddies on a land co-op. Basically a planned community.

"He made it out of some ol' CD players he tore up for parts. Look." He told them pulling out a metal box covered on the outside with gears and wheels. Inside was a fucking crystal with laser beams and mirrors.

"The crystal is coated in a bio-luminescent film. It's supposed to make the laser holographic" he continued. As Kobb spoke Austin inspected the thing turning it over in his hands. A small switch on the bottom activated the device which ran on two 'double a' batteries.

Sitting the device on the table before them Austin flipped the thing on. The gears spun and the lasers moved in the prism until they synched up and a beautiful blue glow came from the thing which rained spinning orbs of light that fell out and disappeared.

"Cool." Thabius was impressed.

Rose was almost speechless "What the fuck is that thing?" before taking another drag off her cigarette.

"It's what you call a concept proof." Said Mr. K. "The beams of light swirl warping space-time. Given enough energy it can

make a loop in time. It's supposed to generate what's called a closed time like curve. The light goes into it's own past. The curve has greater radius than known universe."

"Time dilation, it's quantum" Thabius interjected. "In order for the speed of light to be constant time and space must be relative, in other words they are not absolute."

"It's what happens when you get high in a broom closet for example and it seems like time is passing really slowly."

"You're saying it actually could be?" Caitlyn asked sincerely.

"You would need a finely tuned atomic clock to know for sure" answered Thabius.

They were all well educated although you could never tell just by looking at them.

"The incredible thing about radioactive decay is that it just happens, nobody knows why. When we were on base we used to classify them as happenings or HRPPR-7's for short."

"Yeah?" Like, what's your point dexter Austin snarled.

"The crystal is used to focus the energy into a beam" Kobb said. "But we're having a hard time measuring the lasers output. We always come up with a null signal every time. Cool light though huh?"

"It should at least have a value of point something shouldn't it?" asked Thabius.

"It's the bio-film. When you try to measure it, it's no longer free. You nailed it down." said Rose. She was studying astrophysics at the community college.

"Schrodengers cat dude, if you look at it, it dies." Cat felt a need to remind everyone at the table.

"I don't think that's exactly how it goes" said Thabius with an air of exhaustion.

"Whatever it's the same thing." Rose was sticking up for Cat.

"No it's not [mumbles] whatever." Austin was pretending not to have fun.

"Anyway..." Kobb continued "Gadget couldn't get it to work properly so, I guess he got bored with it and sent it to us. He also lost the keys to the submarine." Kobb was non-plussed.

"Submarine?" asked Maddy politely.

"It's a long story, remind me not to tell it to you sometime" Cat responded patiently.

"I'm not sleepy."

"That's what he calls the school bus. We came up for the show so we could get the spare from Rich. He keeps copies of everything for us."

"This is a like a cross-section of America, true representational democracy. That's why they don't let us vote, if they did God only knows who we would have in office. Thank god for the electoral process." Kobb turned polemic taking deep breaths between each sentence.

"Yeah, but whose god?" Austin looked sexy when he was being smart.

"So what is this thing supposed to prove?" asked Rose directing them back.

"That the distance between two points isn't fixed; as the world would have you believe. Maps never seem exact because they never can be exact" said Kobb.

"It's a giant fractal, the whole world; quasi, self-similarity. Changing one part changes the whole thing. The more finite they graph the coastline the more finite it becomes. Time goes backwards and forward and meets somewhere in the middle. That's what we call the present and we're gonna use the mirror on you!" Kobb said turning playful with wide eyes at Maddy. "Like a solar reflector, two million degrees of focused energy. Just like a laser beam, and you're the crystal. Can you handle it?" Kobb seemed sincerely concerned while simultaneously disingenuous getting up to leave.

"Like staring into the sun, so damn bright I can barely see" Rose remarked cynically. She wasn't particularly impressed.

"Xi Nao?" said Austin.

"Exactly what hole did you two crawl out of again?" Thabius asked.

"Oh, we were at the Dancing Mummies show at the Misty Mountain" said Cat. It was the name of the theater on Asylum Avenue.

"Lick any good doorknobs?" asked Rose condescendingly.

"Walk like an Egyptian" Thabius snickered.

"You can't surf on Astroturf, you wanna get going?" Austin looked at Thabius.

"It's dance, not walk. Different thing dude" Cat huffed in reply.

"Oh? But you believe that tall talk Austin and Kobb told you about time travel?"

"So that's what they were talking about" said Maddy trying not to feel woozy.

Thabius' car was an Urbano. It only held three people, especially if one of them was tall like Austin. Cat and Maddy were stuck on the bus.

"Are you coming back to the Palace?" Rose smiled and she looked at Maddy. The three of them left leaving Cat and Maddy alone in the smoking room.

"The Palace?" Maddy had obviously lost his footing. It takes a while to get your sea legs, some never do and he followed her back down the hall.

"There is only one Palace. The Palace of Bad Dreams. It's ok, I know how to get out this time. If things get too weird you can always exit." Cat could be very reassuring when she needed to be. "Shall we go?"

"Might as well."

Chapter 3

Necessary Illusions

Meanwhile back in Virginia a young woman is preparing breakfast for her husband. He flits about the house like a two hundred fifty pound butterfly while she pours out some cereal. Ned Napalm is on the back of the box touting "Clogged with kick ass vitamins." A phone on the wall rings. There has been an incident on the West Coast as well.

"Can't eat sweetheart emergency meeting at work. I've got to head in now, there's been an incident. I'll call you as soon as I can."

The young bride smiles and kisses her husband goodbye as if this sort of thing happens everyday. "Hey how about Jolly Joe's for dinner?" He shouts as he picks up his keys. "I was thinking pizza." "Sounds great! I'll call your brother and see if he wants to bring the boys."

A patch on his sleeve said "In God We Trust... All Others We Monitor." The Lieutenant approaches the Pentagon he sees a group of "Oh god." They are all holding hands and chanting "Om".

He drove his Chevy to the barrier and parking the car the Lieutenant ducks under the hippies and flashes his credentials to security. Cameras scan his face and the guards let him pass. "Good morning Sir."

"Good morning" Lieutenant Heincraft repeats.

Up through the labyrinthine hallways and groups of tourists he turns a corner off the tour route. The building is ancient and full of exposed pipes ducts and retrofitted electrical panels. It looks like the guts of a submarine or an ancient shitty building. Stained drop tile ceilings and linoleum.

He walked past a room full of TV monitors and small cubicles. Inside uniformed men are watching and taking notes on satellite feeds from around the world.

One of the stations was showing a live feed of a congressional hearing. "The enemy could very easily plant a foreign agent as a doctor in a hospital or his own office. Using fake examinations they could then place people under their power. Hypnotizing key officials he could take over an entire branch of government. You could even be programmed to be unaware of the instructions carried in the lowest layers of your consciousness."

"Are we the guinea pigs? How would we know?" asked a Congressman.

"I can assure you of one thing. The Chemical Corps of the Army has not found it necessary to do so up until now. The blowback should be minimal. Except for a few borderline psychotics pushed over the edge by the drug the economy won't suffer any significant setback."

"The enemy might try to subvert the United States by dumping a few pounds of LSD into the water supply of major cities. The only way to prepare for such an attack is to dose our own reservoirs first."

"Doesn't chlorine neutralize it?"

"We've developed resistant forms. EA-3167"

Across the hall from the press room a sweaty DNN correspondent in a closet dressed only from the waist up is fumbling for a pull down image of the White House lawn like a photo booth.

Lieutenant Heincraft approaches a door and shows armed sentries credentials before entering a conference room. A secretary announces the arrival of the Intelligence Officials. He takes the needle off an antique turn style and pushes a button to resume an audio log of the meeting.

"What in the hell happened in Portland this morning?" The new President brusquely asked. The stationary still had the previous office holder's initials on them.

"The dead-cells have been activated. Carcinoma has begun early."

"My predecessor was a fool." The President paused to rally his resources.

"Lieutenant. How has Tempest been preceding?"

"Initial results? Very successful."

A man with dark eyes sat in the corner watching.

"So you think you can tell?"

"Well, you can never tell."

"Oh, time will tell."

"We are sending a gift. Have our local resources send an invitation and tell Sid down at the Edge I'm proud of his work. I'll make sure the stars are in place.

He buzzed his aide "Have legal add a special exemption to our funding bill."

"I wish I could put these wackos in a home somewhere" says Hiencraft.

"Have we had any problems?" The President asked.

"One of our employee's is hysterical, she entered a trance like state and claimed that the doctors were trying to manipulate her body. She was obviously having paranoid ideas."

"Is there anything else?"

"Yes, those Dippies outside. They're trying to levitate the building."

"Fuck, James." he muttered trying to maintain decorum.

"Why all today? Don't we have people for that?"

"We don't plan for absurdities Sir."

"I don't care. Have security deal with it. Just don't shoot any of them."

The word rung in his head like an echo chamber and the command was passed down the line.

Inside the room were five decorative columns. The man in the corner put a manual on the desk face down "LSD: Unpsychedelic Implications", classified and asked the men "Would you like a demonstration?"

"Bullshit. It would never work on me or any other person of intelligence" said Heincraft.

"Of course not sir. Would you like to see how we would do it though? How it's done?"

"I've already got my hands full. See you at Ground Zero for lunch?"

"Sure thing. You know they really ought to change the name of that place."

Chapter 4

Palace Of Bad Dreams

Clews

He suffered terror on the train and complained "I can't breath. I feel like we're going nowhere. Where will we go from here? I can't go back to my mom's house" Maddy asked.

"The Palace of course. Just keep talking to me." The road was full of mud.

Maddy and Caitlyn got off near Skidmore Fountain and started walking up Burnside. They walked past a strip club called Diablo's with flames everywhere when they came across the Anarchist Union Building and Caitlyn grabbed Maddys arm.

"Wait, look." Cait asked him and Maddy responded "I think I'm still tripping, that reflection looked weird. Deja Vu."

They peered into the steamed up windows, saw themselves and kept walking. Past the Crack Press and Dirty Duck Cat said "When we change the future the past changes too. Backwards

causality. So you get these artifacts, leftovers. Sometimes there is overlap when there's a sudden shift. A glass might knock over on its own with no apparent cause. Maybe you were meant to knock it over but the whole chain of the universe was set on a new course splitting time and space. Some people think that's how magic works, by jumping things on a quantum level. I mean when it's not a trick."

"So what happens next?"

"I don't know. It hasn't happened yet" she said walking past a Square J parking lot.

He wondered what they would like together naked.

"Have you done this, I mean has this; have you done this before?"

"Uhm. Maybe, a few times." Caitlyn grimaced. "I'm getting sick of all this repetition but it will be different this time."

Maddy looked at Caitlyn and she was staring down the street with confident aloofness. He took a big breath and held it imperceptibly. I wish I had some whiskey he thought. Caitlyn turned to stare "I think we have some at home."

"Hey come here! Do you want to get married?" Caitlyn asked grabbing his arm looking desperately into his eyes.

"Sure?" Maddy was curiously enchanted, and smiling.

They stood outside the twenty-four hour Church of Elvis which was advertised with blinking lights and hot glued brick-a-brak. All manner of repurposed vending machines were mounted into the wall. You could have your fortune read for a quarter and upstairs for fifteen dollars you could be married (officially for ten dollars more).

Walking up the steps and paying the fee thereof they picked plastic rings out of a wicker basket. Maddy picked out a plastic orange lobster.

The bridge had become too unsafe for large vehicles so the bus line no longer ran and they walked the rest of the way through John's Landing and over the Sellwood bridge on their way to East Moreland. The air smelled of woodsmoke and spice.

The stars seemed to be watching them as a crescent moon rose in the murky east and Caitlyn started singing Moon of Alabama.

Frische Milch

East Moreland was a fancy neighborhood with Tudor style homes and large elm trees across from a public golf course. They rolled up to an unassumingly large Queen Anne Victorian with a three digit address, a hallmark of it's age. It was framed by two large redwoods and a wooden porch which led into a series of rooms and ante-rooms which could be separated with the use of large wooden dividers hidden in the walls. It contained four stories not including the 'spacment'. Anax had made the low, gothic wrought iron gate outside as part of a project when he was in art school. Manny was like a brother to him.

They were standing in the light pouring out of the windows like a jello rainbow; loudly. There were city violation stickers on the door and in the driveway was a pile of rotten furniture and paint cans.

The rain on the windows wiggled and pulsed and seemed to be alive. Maddy started to feel good, his body felt like it was being massaged by faeries, again, the drugs.

"Would you like to take the grand tour?" Caitlyn asked. They walked in through the unlocked front door and locked it behind them. A fireplace built into the wall connected two of the

rooms leading to the kitchen which was stocked with gin and sprouts, craft root and ginger beers. Felix the Cat was on the wall swishing out the seconds with his tail as his eyes darted about the room. A box of moldy clementines sat on the counter.

Rose was deep frying red pasta pin-wheels that puffed up when she cooked them. "Where the fuck have you two been? Shit has been straight crazy around here."

"Roaming about" Caitlyn replied with a wicked smile.

"Did you hear what happened?"

"Uh, yeah we know" said Maddy wearing a purple hoodie.

"Are you hungry?" She asked. Caitlyn looked at him "they're so cheap we always have some around except when we run out" and dragged him into the next room without responding.

Seventh seal was playing on mute, in black-and-white, on the tv in the front room.

Sabrina 'the artist', Rose and Austin were clustered around the floor of the darkened room smoking rollies and ashing into a ceramic dead fetus shaped ashtray Sabrina made. Maddy was trying to figure out if he liked it or not. He did in theory, but was trying not to over think it. His stomach turned.

The walls inside were painted like a Cuban restaurant bright greens and turquoise, magenta and yellow. There were day of the dead style skeletons by espisote on the shelf near the fridge which was covered in magnets and art. One of the magnets read 'I was sodomized at the Palace of Bad Dreams and all I got was this stupid magnet'. Maddy's pupils widened.

It was dark inside and Maddy was trying to figure out if it was because they were Goth or were just saving on the light bill.

"It's nice to meet you. We're always hunting for new meat" explained Sabrina with a smile.

"Las gitanas de la sierra morena quieren carne de hombres." Austin was studying Spanish at the community college and was wearing all black including his slicked back hair except for a red vest under his suit.

He felt like if he stuck around long enough all the secrets of the universe would be revealed to him.

Maddy assumed they were talking about him. It seemed like they had a strange never ending contest with no clear winner as to who could find the most interesting new cultural transplant. Thabius was holding court, talking about the sex industry. He ran a finishing school with Rose: Orpheus' Orpheum for Orphans or OOO for short.

"You know a lot of 'normal' people are very sick inside. The same people that call a sex worker a human slave, are the ones that won't hire you for looking normal enough, then pay you twenty dollars after hours for a blow job. They are ashamed of themselves, but will never admit it."

It was their common link. They knew peoples secrets. They knew things about people they would never admit to their own wives and families. It was nothing special for them, the veil was lifted and there was just a bleak, sad world behind it. The darkness is really just truth.

"Most people are weirded out within minutes, or hours. I'm surprised you're still here" said Austin. They continued talking to each other as if they expected him to create his own entertainment. Sabrina read out of some book "Jesus is a zombie who was raised by Satan as a baby and on Halloween he has to eat brains."

Austin started laughing before taking another drag off his rollie "What is that?"

"Some fanfic porn: Larry Pothead and the Source of the Stoned."

Maddy noticed a corner of the wall near where the kitchen met the living room and the paint had petered out. "What's up with the corner? Have you just recently been painting?" Sabrina looked at Maddy with the eyes of a cat and turned away from him, walking into the hallway quietly. He looked at Austin.

"She's sort of superstitious" said Austin putting out a cigarette into the ashtray.

"Hey, what about the halloween party?"

"Dude, I'm already really high, we can go next year."

Sabrina returned to explain herself. "I believe when you finish a project that's when it usually gets fucked up, or something happens to it so I never finish any of my art projects. I usually leave a small corner of something to work on."

Maddy pulled out a pack of caramel colored shag rolling tobacco and rolled a cigarette. If not to fit in, than just so he had a filter for all the second hand smoke in the room.

Thabius asked what his new pet gutter punk what he would have done if he hadn't met him. He was naked except for a furry knit hat that made him look like some kind of animal. "I wouldn't be homeless. I would make friends with the Squirrel King and live with the squirrels." He was making an ashtray for Thabius out of leaves and sand even though Thabius didn't smoke.

Maddy turned to Thabius "Not to be rude but why the hell is it so dark in here?"

"It takes a certain kind of person to be able to tolerate the darkness for extended periods. A personal inner darkness trumps the outer one." He paused for dramatic effect. "That, and heroin makes your pupils pin-holes. Bright lights hurt my pets. When I find them they are often searching for discarded

children in the dumpsters. If you ever see someone digging in the trash do not disparage them, they could be looking for lost souls, maybe even their own."

"So if you guys are hippies, how come you aren't all wearing tie-die?"

"The hippies all wear black now" Cat said.

"Does that mean it's back to beatnik days, or is it black to neat beat days?" Maddy asked.

"We were never hippies. We're the Crew" said Thabius. Maddy stared blankly.

"Crew of crazy cavalier characters who cavort around the country causing all kinds of chaos and commotion, concluding with a comeuppance of both cast and crew by completing the case of the creative conundrum." He said quoting one of his favorite movies.

"So whatever happened to the hippies anyway?" asked Maddy like a baby sheep with food in his mouth, eating some pistachio's.

"CEA changed the program, that's what." Replied Austin dryly.

"The who?" Maddy asked.

"They have so many names what's the point of keeping track." Sabrina sighed taking a drag off her cigarette before ashing it into the fetus.

Just then Rose poked her head in. "A man is at the door in the wall."

A loose man walked in with a smile of gold. "Here's your bud buddy. It's a QP like we agreed, plus a few extra ounces of some smaller buds and stuff" handing Cait an oven bag.

"What kind is it?" She asked.

"OG Kush."

"Hmm." Caitlyn looked slightly disappointed. "I just tried a new strain the other day Blue Cheese, holy fuck it's awesome."

"Yeah, alright buddy. We good?"

"Yeah."

"Later." He disappeared just as fast as he came in.

"Whoa Shit. How can you afford that?"

"Huh? Oh I don't pay for it."

Maddy looked sidelong and got scared of asking anymore questions.

Caitlyn took him by the hand and led him towards the staircase where you could hear the Meatmen coming up over the hi-fi. A blond dready dude covered in sawdust passed them on the stairs.

"Who's your friend? Where've you been?"

"Climbing on heaven and gazing on earth. This is Maddy. Maddy this is Manny Pulandum. We're about to take bong hits in the Spacement. Want to join us?"

"Fuck yeah. I'll meet you down there in a minute. I found a new way to puzzle wood together, check it out." He showed them a drum he had been working on and when they got downstairs a herd of kittens chased after their socks and they were greeted by a Tiki Bar. There was also a life size

cardboard cutout of John Wayne with a beer holder wedged into the hand. String lights illuminated bar.

"No shit." Maddy said quietly to himself.

Whiskey, Mystics And Men

Rich was downstairs watching a muted slumber party on TV.

Caitlyn already looked old, she was only twenty two.

Blondie returned with a plate of biscuits and a crock of gravy and they started serving each other. It was seasoned with creole seasoning. He swore it made everything better, although his favorite discovery was sprinkling it on the outside of grilled cheese.

"Rye whiskey!" Maddy exclaimed looking across the bar.

"Oh man. I was thinking Carlson's pizza" Caitlyn said looking forlorn.

"Get it yourself or don't complain." Maddy was calm.

"Hey could you pass the ketchup?" she asked. As he was handing the bottle to her he noticed something

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing short of saving the world" she said with a grin.
"We're hackers Maddy; social engineers, exploiting their programming. Wanna join? Dude you've got to come with us." Caitlyn grew serious.

"You're on" said Rich.

"On what?" Laughed Manny.

"We're going to the Hailla Gala Ball and I'm making a movie. You have to see it man. We won't be back until next fall."

"You're shitting me" Maddy said.

"We're going to the premier. You should totally come" Caitlyn told him.

"It's about the butterfly time travel program. It's a twist on the butterfly flapping it's wings thing. Anyway, to the good times!"

They all started to eat and one of their roommates who lived upstairs, a writer named Jed joined them.

A white kitten sat on Caitlyns lap. She stroked it and called it Snowdrop.

In the spacement was a brick fireplace with a mirror hanging above it and carpeted living area with guitars and djembebes adjacent to the bar where they sat. When they moved in they found a triple perk bong along with some weird books like one on how to pick up chicks in college towns. It was across the street from Reed.

They continued eating. "I always wanted to go to South America and do ayhuasca" she told Maddy. "They believe at twilight you can send messages to your beloved through song."

Manny spoke up with food in his mouth. "We were about to deal with the couch that's in front of the house. We got a notice from the city it has to be removed so we're dragging it to the golf course to burn it. Want to come?"

"Uh, no thanks. It sounds like a lot of fun, even though it's a horrible idea" Maddy responded.

"Hey, it wasn't my idea it was Jed's."

"To burn the couch?"

"No, to drag it to the golf course. Burning it was Rich's idea. We're going to pour all the old paint and like, flammable liquids in the garage on it cause we have to get rid of those too." He seemed as cheerful as if he was out to feed the homeless for a church project.

Maddy and Caitlyn both started laughing out loud "Let's get ripped first, besides we should wait 'till it's really dark" she said.

Manny loaded the bong and passed it to Maddy. He took a hit and as he exhaled Cat said "You look like a dragon". Maddy he smiled and a man with wild brown hair ran out of his room which was across from the bar, in small a hallway.

Cat spoke up "His dad bought the place when he was in college, we rent from him. He's been reading a lot of Aleister Crowley lately. He's got a whole sheet of acid and he's been eating a tab or two a day for the past two weeks trying to 'reprogram' himself."

Somehow that included turning the bathroom into an exercise in abstract art. It reeked of fresh paint and was covered in about 20 different colors. He was also stealing things from the public library and giving them out as gifts which had something to do with the herd of kittens patrolling the spacement. He left Caitlyn an Ottis Redding cd. She actually wasn't pleased, stealing from the library?

Just then the herd of kittens ran past chasing something only they could see and he chased after them, up the stairs.

"Awwwoooo!"

"Aaah, goddamnit" Maddy muttered.

"He's been howling a lot lately too" Manny added.

"All my siblings have lived here while they were in school" said Manny.

Maddy was looking at a copy of *Revolution in the Revolution* by Regis Debray and it had a bunch of notes written in by hand. He read one of the scribbles aloud: "The US standard of living is a bourgeois baby blanket for executives who scream in their sleep. Our fight is with those who would kill us through dumb work, insane wars, dull money morality." It was signed 'Digger'.

"They say it's the book that killed thousands" Manny told him.

"And, check THIS out!" Manny was proud of his find. "I found it in the stacks when I was looking for some obscure stuff on the French student revolution."

"I tried to read it but I didn't want to damage it."

Maddy reached out and grabbed the thing which he had been using as a trivet, inspecting it and prying apart the pages.

"I think it's a book about magic" continued Manny. "Sort of crude philosophy."

"I think it's a magic book" said Maddy taking it from him.

"Don't believe, or act on everything you read. It could get you in some serious..."

"Shit! Who left the window open?" Caitlyn half screamed. The wind and rain beat against a grey sky outside and a squirrel hopped in and ran up the stairs. Sounds of madness followed it.

"Shut that thing!"

"A Grimm" said Thabius who had come downstairs to tell them Austin, Sabrina and Rose were driving back to LA. "We're going back to Lala Land."

"You don't live here?" Maddy asked setting the book back down.

"Are you for real?" asked Rose. She realized he was. "No. We were just visiting for the weekend. You should have spent more time with us if you wanted." They only came up to DJ on the weekend occasionally. Rich finished eating and followed them up.

"Smell ya later" said Maddy picking the book back up.

"Do I have to hold it up to the light or something? I don't see anything" said Manny taking it from him. Maddy wasn't sure if he was joking. His jokes seemed serious.

On the front it said "CLAVIS OMNI ALETHEIA". It looked old but obviously was a reprint and was covered in pink dots, mildew stains. On the back it had the Acacia tree with ten branches growing out the back of a turtle, two fishes staring at a frog sitting on a skeleton which was holding it's knees.

"This book is weird" said Caitlyn taking it from Manny before Maddy grabbed it back, from her.

Maddy read aloud "Quia vero symbolica sunt. It uses symbols and ancient names to not only invoke and conjure figuratively, but literally as well. It only unlocks itself to those who understand what is come before."

"I didn't know you spoke latin" Cait inquired.

Jed returned upstairs collecting dishes as he went.

"I don't."

"Then how do we understand this?"

"I am filled with a sense of deep intuition. I understand life; the winds and silence" trying to keep a straight face.

"It's great to be unemployed" said Manny without looking up.
"Why books are written which cannot be understood?"

"Try to understand" Maddy replied.

No one had noticed but it had gotten really dark outside. Over the hills and far off in the distance a coyote was heard and while Maddy began to speak the fire creaked. "In the holy houses far away their pillars hold the wolves at bay." Wind blew. "It says to invoke inspiration."

"At what cost?"

"Doesn't say."

"That's madness. Everything comes at a price."

"Talía saecula suis dixerunt currere fusi concordēs stabili
factorum numine parcae inspirationem et quantum sat erit tua
dicere facta: Dark fear spin secrets in your dreams disappear
transform what seems there are many gates to many lands
find one that suits look in your hands tears of the young tooth
of the wolf tollumkorn prepares the birth when order found is
chaos too together birth the universe anew with spirit of the
honeydew mix the barley with the herb hair of dog cock and
spur out of chaos comes order of the wind borne ancient order
speak to see see to hear give your love the price most dear"
catching his breath "...and a recipe for beer?"

They all just sort of looked at him, obviously expecting an explanation.

"I have no idea but I love the poetry of it" he said repeating one of the lines in latin "ille tua qui amat carmina. Without punctuation it's hard to tell exactly what it means. It looks like it was translated from eighteenth century French, written by a Swiss German and edited by an Austrian."

He continued "A shrine common to the whole earth, and of all the divine things that exist among men, it is both the most awesome and the most luminous. Their ancient book of the Dead had spells to return the doomed sacrifices. This book is the key, it's only answers."

"Then we have to look for the questions" Caitlyn said setting her plate down and wiping her mouth.

Waiting For A Point Of Intersection

Maddy opened the book to Chapter 13 and begun to read 'Disputatio De Planetarum Influxu - Il Principe Secula'

"Laissez les bons temps rouler" said Caitlyn interrupting him with a mischievous smile. Light from the fire cast swaying shadows on the wall.

"A country girl walked through splintered sunlight when suddenly her dog got bit by an adder. The girl ran and got lost. Walking through green fields the richest wild flowers sprung up in grain and she observed a penned bull named Samael which bellowed 'om' when it saw her. She wandered over and cooed at it "Pachakuti!"

Through the twilight she sung a song as if someone could hear. Her steps alone tread a path. The sun set on mountains in the distance and looking down she saw little mushrooms. Not knowing from whence or where they came she put them in her basket and fell asleep against a thorn apple tree.

She dreamt she was walking alone towards a lighthouse with a falcon that flew the world unsated.

She heard what she thought was some kind of rooster cry when she realized she had been awakened by an owl sometime around midnight which sang for a while and flew away. She started crying and in the distance a wolf howled as the cold north wind blew.

Looking about her she saw the crimson stained fleece of a ram and ran.

"The Janis Tree!" Caitlyn interrupted excitedly.

"What?"

"Golden Gate Park. We gotta go!" Maddy kept reading, she interrupted again.

"The pro-phe-cy!" She started cackling and Maddy started laughing with her "What the fuck?"

"Just keep reading, she's high." Manny said shaking his head slightly trying not to smile. The formatting was terrible and slightly confusing, he felt sic.

"She looked to the sky for direction but could not find Sirius and began to get worried when a bear rumbled towards the tree and stood up before disappearing over the horizon. She thought to herself 'I've never seen anything like that before.'

Instead of being frightened she laughed out loud at the sight of the dancing bear and began to wonder if any of her six sisters at home were missing her.

When she went to see what became of the bear she found only a deep cliff which seemed to have no bottom. Although she could not see it, something chattered to her from the tree. It seemed to be laughing. She shouted back 'You're no trickster, you are death without mercy!'

She followed a creek and made her way to the crossing where a dead puppy lie. It had stopped being fun and she became increasingly frightened.

Straying down to the water she thought of crossing when saw something in the water and thought to grab it but the undertow swept it further and further. She thought of getting in where a frog on the bank seemed to be saying 'knee-deep'.

Near the water was a man sitting on a moss covered rock. His quest had become one of sleep as he was overcome with weariness.

"And what do you think he saw?" Maddy asked with a grin and continued without answer. "A noble maiden from the land of Ermonie for whose sake many a warrior and men of high degree would compete.

'How did you get here?' she asked the man surprised, forgetting her reflection. 'Did my sisters tell you to come look for me? I'm sure they are counting the hours. We're the only ones that travel all three lands. We pick mandragor and pennyroyal to sell at the market. If we don't our father Saul will sell us instead. My sister Lis thinks he is mean, though she is very nice.'

'This night is not like any other' he told her pointing to a crescent which hung in the sky, but it was not the moon.

'Who are you?' she asked. 'My, but you are ragged!'

'I have traveled great distances and slayed dragons' laughing said the stranger.

To which the girl replied 'Thought through heart, life by magic. I'm Helen but everyone calls me lil' she said holding a laurel.

'You may call me Al.'

'For mere mortals their destiny is decreed.' The laughing stranger told her his name was Alulim.

'I have a tablet and I am looking for the other. It allows me to do things which can't be done.'

With him he carried a lamp in the form of a lion which bore the head of a human and held an unwavering flame, it looked to be very old. 'My mother Delphia gave it to me.'

Moisture began to fall in the form of rain. Thunder pealed. She sang soft and sweet a song of sixpence 'blackbirds in a pie, let us find our way home before we get old and die.'

Towering broad in the foggy garden was an eight sided ruin with inscriptions of winged men on each face, one holding a pitcher and pouring it out.

'Do you really posses magical tablets?'

'Do you doubt it?'

'Well if you do what do they say then?'

He pulled out of his satchel an engraving of a star which enclosed a dot, a circular shape with four rays coming out the four directions.

'The tablets of destiny. Whomsoever possesses them can rule the minds and destinies of people through the use of potion and incantation. You must walk through the gates of sleep, know the incantations and names to get past the demons and out.'

She was in the dirt putting a harness on a pony and said 'Well, I want to ride in the sun but think I need a heavier whip. Would you please help?'

'Omnia vincit amor oportet sit hoc modo, a disease whose only cure is true loves kiss.'

He leaned down and kissed the small horse and she laughed, the horse didn't budge.

'I'll bear the load' he said.

'Then I will help you find your tablet. You'll never find it by looking out here.'

'How is that?' The man replied. 'Do you know this land?'

'No, I am new to this land but I am familiar with the tablet. I know where it is.'

'You must tell me.'

'The tablet ahead and tablet behind both pale to this' she smiled pointing to his chest.

The bull saw the civilized man and snorted, smashing the gates and tearing the posts out of the ground. She raised her palm toward the beast and spit 'ptah'. She grabbed it's lead and fed it some of the mushrooms she'd gathered earlier 'The world is a reflection of his desire' she said looking at it and lead it back to the pen.

He looked at her. 'Shall we go?'

The night was cool, fog began to cover everything.

'Return to earth join ancient birth, meet where the path runs straight & high.' She seemed to be quoting something.

In the footsteps of dawn she ran laughing singing 'fair as the wave is' in the mountain air and stumbled along a castle wall following a team of geese.

She was enchanted by this strange land where animals seemed to speak and things had a double form, removed from the cares of the world as they walked beside a fountain.

"Hey Maddy you have some pitch for the food?" Manny asked and Maddy chuckled "Yeah, right."

Caitlyn intervened "Maddy he's serious, shit isn't free you know."

"Um." Maddy pulled \$2.27 out of his pocket "thanks for lunch."

"You don't sound too sure" Manny said suspiciously.

Maddy looked down to finish the story. *"When the sun rose that morning it had a strange stowaway accompanying it, a crown. She was examining a green sprout in the light when the man told her 'You may come with me or remain but I am leaving.'"*

She had become lost and he was offering her companionship on the way back home.

'But who will water the garden? Who will feed the dog? Without me the grass will rot and the bull will starve. Besides won't your friend be hungry soon?'

They turned to leave yet couldn't find the path they'd used to enter.

'How will we find our way back?' he asked.

The man became frightened and thought she might be with a spirit of some kind and called out 'Whomsoever's realm this is release me and I will grant you your desire' making a covenant. 'Deliver me from the depths of the realm of the dead.'

He continued to walk until he found he was only speaking with himself. His sleeves were covered in ash.

Far behind she was picking mushrooms. When she finally realized her loss she went down to the water and cried. Instead of the ring this time she grabbed for the frog and fell in.

When he returned it was not the next day but the same from which he had begun. He thought to himself 'If only I knew how to come and go as I pleased, then I could persuade the maiden to return with me.'

Vrttaratnakara

"I've had enough of examining the richness of nature, let's get loaded. Pass me that bottle would you?" Caitlyn said.

"Chapter 37 talks about a binary code that's thousands of years old. Uktā vasantatilakā tabhajā jagau gaḥ"

"babadalgharg..." Manny said mocking him.

"BGWJJILLIGK!" and they all started in together

"Hjckrrh!"

"Bla blee bla" with more and more chaotic laughter until one of them started 'om'ing' and they all joined in and quieted down.

"The number from our binary system is 2996, that much I'm sure, the translation is less clear. It speaks of a 'blossom born from heat victorious and impenetrable' is about the best I can do."

"You know 'G' is the twenty third letter in the alphabet?" Manny said.

"You can either believe in coincidence or you can work with it. People that ignore synchronicity and call it coincidence are only missing opportunities." Caitlyn responded. "Do you still not get it?"

"I don't, I think I'm dumb. Hey check this out" he said pointing to an acrostic in Virgil that spelled out mars.

"Mars goes into retrograde for seventy two days every twenty five months. For seventy days from April to August Sirius disappears along with the Pleiades. The the great cycle, the liberator of the living and the dead." Maddy said reading the book.

"Read it right Maddy. It says living-dead, as in zombies. Fess up to it." Cait said.

"Death has many names" Maddy said without looking up and Cat took a hit from the bong, the grass instantly vaporizing.

He read under the heading April 25th "Walk across the belly of the Illapa through the inframundo to accompany Sirius. The earth moves one degree every seventy two years in the procession of the zodiac due to the twenty three degree angled tilt of the Earth. Seventy two is the angle in a pentagram and some cathedrals contain the whole book."

"Thirty two teeth in a jawbone" Cat said melodically.

"Look on page twenty six. It says 'God is exalted and unknowable' then it's ripped out until thirty six where it says 'The number of his years is beyond counting'. The ratio between the two page numbers is point seven two" Maddy continued.

"So the number of god is seventy two?" Cat asked.

"Look at Pi squared. It's an infinite unknowable expression that looks almost identical to the fifteenth number in the Fibonacci sequence... the fractal."

"The more you explain the less you know. Fiyah." Caitlyn said. Maddy stared blankly. "Fire. Do you have fire?" She said snapping her fingers in front of his face "the lighter?"

The question came upon him like a trap.

"Huh? No."

"Check your pockets."

Maddy continued "Venus goes into retrograde for forty days. The forty verses of Psalm thirty-seven start with every letter except ayin. The eye of Horus Ra, the sun. The spring sacrifice is when Venus goes into retrograde. Forty days of rain in Genesis 4:7; Four thousand fed, seven loaves left."

"What does that have to do with Mars?"

"I don't know. Maybe that's the point."

"Jupiter descends from the crystal palace in thunder bugs and lightning, sitting on an eagle. He threw a thunderbolt and his spurs went a jingle. Claiming destiny saying 'have a little faith' with a wink and a smile in his spaceship with style he vanished in the sunbeams."

"What is that shit Maddy?"

"I think it's from King Lear."

It had a picture of Horus' wings, scribbled the margins of a page someone had written 'Lew Welch was here'.

"It's decentralized data sharing. Look, if you look up bible verses using numbers from the Fibonacci sequence the verses have themes. It's almost as if it gives the passages context that so often is argued. This book is intense."

"Do you still not believe in synchronicity?" Cat asked.

"I thought it was coincidence?" he replied.

"Right" she said.

"This book is nothing but strange coincidences." Maddy said looking it over before closing it.

"Maybe it isn't a random coincidence. What are the odds." Manny said getting up, finishing his beer.

"Astronomical" Maddy replied handing his plate to him.

"That's fabulous Doctor" Caitlyn said.

"Naturally" said Maddy with a smile and a touch of grace.

"Do you still seek to know, and what?" He said closing it.

"The Psychedelic Rangers with their hit The Dice Are Loaded" on the radio gave way to a news update and Caitlyn said "Hey be quiet I haven't heard the news today."

"In tonight's news there were a two-thousand, nine hundred ninety six initial casualties when a mechanic managed to get into the air a helicopter he was neither authorized nor qualified to fly and crashed into an area hospital shortly after takeoff; Co-ordination point news."

"Do you think that's weird?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know" she said with an easy smile.

"Don't kid yourself" said ever steady Manny

"Should I adult myself then?" Maddy asked.

"Uhm.. maybe later, in private" Caitlyn said and started laughing.

"That's right Maddy, go ahead speak truth to power because you are powerless. Bwahaaha!" She gave him a smile and he showed a rosy cheek. "You are mine!"

"News travels fast" said Manny.

As Maddy protested she reached over pulling him in and kissed him. She wasn't sure how he would interpret this naked aggression.

"So I'm a little unsettled still, what does it all mean?" Maddy asked her.

"Well you know what they say, it is what it is, and it ain't what it ain't."

"But fuck. I feel lost!"

"You can't get lost if you don't know where your going."

"Where are you going? Another adventure?"

"To bed."

"Let me come."

"I won't stop you. Come on Cinderella boy" Caitlyn said. Maddy was still holding on to the book and brought it with him setting it in his bag. They walked upstairs to the main floor and in the hallway cracks ran through a nondescript looking door. Up a flight of stairs into the converted attic space with a

California King size bed a smaller door in the corner led to a storage area.

On the wall was a poster of a Klimt painting, a woman receiving a kiss. On a shelf framing the stair case below it was a book of Rumi poetry and a glass of water. Lovers entwined in gold.

"What about your boyfriend?"

"He's not really my boyfriend. Besides, when he finds out I stole his wallet he's going to be pissed."

"Anything not nailed down."

"He owes me!"

"Hey do you wanna smoke some DMT? I extracted it myself, it's pure."

"Ok" it sounded like fun and Caitlyn's aggression really turned him on. She took out a small baggie of beige powder and sprinkled a decent amount on top of a swirly glass spoon and let Maddy spark it. "Sharing is caring" she said taking the pipe.

They had to lay back and the bed was one of the sweet fucking space foam things. They were there. Lying next to each other he reached for her hand to steady himself and she squeezed. Turning towards her they embraced and her short, soft hair brushed against him and she pulled him closer.

Officium Defunctorum

"So what did you do before you met us?"

"I was wwoofing. Working on ranches, cowboy stuff."

"Like doing what?"

"Sheep herding mostly in northern Arizona. On the reservation they still have wide open spaces. Even though it doesn't pay shit I love it. I met some great folks out there."

"Doesn't that make you a sheep boy?"

He sighed deeply "The term is still cowboy. Besides, I punched cattle, I work with all kinds of livestock, on horseback too."

"I have me a cowboy."

Who Dares Name the Nameless?

A candle rested on the windowsill illuminating a rooftop garden.

Meanwhile downstairs the guys got into the medicine cabinet. All they could find was some dimenhydrinate and road flares.

They dreamt of point d'esprit.

Manny rushed up the stairs when they heard birds outside "It must be getting early."

"Why are you asleep? The caravan is being readied."

"I thought we were late?"

Nobody really gets angry.

"I found Rich soaking wet. He took a shower with his clothes on and was sweeping up a corner of the carpet where he pee'd. I guess he'd gotten a lecture when someone teleported in. I think he might have hallucinated and was trying to make sense of feeling where he said all his nerves felt like they were on fire." He was trying his best to be serious.

They started dressing. While he was talking Caitlyn grabbed a pair of bibs and put them on tossing a purple hoodie on top and he grabbed his bag.

Rich was already outside waiting and the four of them drug the couch four blocks to the golf course with the paint and everything piled on top and Manny pulled out the road flares and handed two to Maddy, Caitlyn promptly taking one out of his hand and lighting it stuffed it into the mess when they heard sirens approaching from a short distance.

"Holy shit that was quick!"

"We better get outta here." Manny said with a grin on his face while Rich quietly smiled watching the flames grow.

"We'll catch up with you guys later" said Caitlyn grabbing Maddy's hand which really turned him on and ran towards the house with Rich and Manny leaving the opposite direction towards their house of clowns.

It was a raging blaze.

As Maddy and Caitlyn walked back towards the house, avoiding the main streets they saw the police cars zoom right past the golf course towards the empty house.

Outside there was a car with donut shaped device on the backseat with wires going to trunk and antennas all over damn thing and more than four hundred Joint Terrorism Task Force officers surrounding the place. Someone announced "Occupants of Knapp Street, this is the Portland Police speaking. Come out with your hands up!" They watched along with several other people in the neighborhood for a minute

wondering what to do. "All our shit's in there" Caitlyn said as if she was speaking to herself.

After several attempts to get anyone out of the Palace, a member of the SWAT team fired tear gas projectiles into the home which was immediately followed by heavy bursts of automatic gunfire; it caught fire shortly thereafter.

Watching the televised siege live from their room across the street Rich asked Manny "Do you think they'll be alright?" and started laughing "I can't wait to see their expressions when they get back."

"Oh my god." Manny started laughing "What did you do?"

"What did I do? Caitlyn stole my wallet. She doesn't know that I know yet though. Earlier this afternoon I called and left an anonymous tip that her house is where the Smallholder Liberation Front was head quartered. I just wanted to get my moneys worth."

"That's very thoughtful of you."

"I'm good person."

Caitlyn panicked "Oh my god, we are fucked!"

"What are we going to do?"

"If shit is this serious, anywhere we are known the FBI will be looking for us." Maddy had never seen this strong woman scared before, it made him feel slightly better about himself and worse about everything else. She took a deep breath through her nose and wiped her hair back from her face.

"Ok. We gotta go, now. Are you coming?"

Maddy didn't know what else to do but he didn't want to be alone.

"Of course."

There was a train yard adjacent to the south end of the golf course and they hopped the first train they could find. Caitlyn used the spare change she found in her pockets to buy a bottle along the way. It was going south and got cold as fuck riding dirty face on a canola oil car and they huddled together for warmth. It was fucking freezing when the bottle ran out in the Kalamath mountains. Small waterfalls were everywhere on the steep right side where there were no roads. It was something only conductors and dirty kids ever saw. It was beautiful.

Chapter 5

American Beauty

Spare The Rod, Spoil The Child

The train started speeding up as it went through Eugene and they hopped off about forty miles outside of town without a highway in sight. Hiking through hazelnut orchards they approached two older men sitting in the driveway of a small cute home; alcoholics because there were two cases of diet soda next to their lawn chairs and a case worth of empties surrounding them. Maddy never drank diet soda because of the artificial sweeteners but he was so thirsty after being on the train for the better part of a day with no water he accepted a can from the men and drank gingerly. Caitlyn did as well. The guys were cynical but curious about the two kids who seemed to appear magically in the middle of nowhere; and filthy as fuck. For some reason the kids accepted an offer from the guys for a ride a few miles to a highway where they could hitch in.

I didn't take long for them to flag down an RV. The driver told them his story. He worked for a national chain store and drove cross country setting up stores. His son had been a successful rave promoter who had overdosed and it pained him greatly. He told them of his ongoing legal battles with his sons childhood friends slash business partners over the estate.

They got into a small company town about five minutes to midnight.

It was desolate since the mill had shut down and looked apocalyptic.

Sitting on a bench and rearranging their gear when Cat saw a feral swarm of kids walking in the middle of the darkened, quiet street. There were probably about seven of them ranging in age. The youngest was drinking from a 40oz bottle of malt liquor.

"Oh my god." Cats pupils dilated

"What the fuck.." Maddy scrunched up his face and cocked his head like a puppy.

Maddy and Caitlyn didn't know if they should be concerned the children were drinking or if they were about to get mugged.

"Hey. What's up." The oldest kid flipped her chin up and gave a quizzical glare to them.

"Um. Hi, do you guys know of a park or something around here we might be able to crash in for the night without getting arrested? We just got in like three minutes ago.

The kids quickly looked them over and with a glance at each other started nodding.

"You guys are cool, you can come stay at our house tonight. Our parents will like you. They're pretty cool."

Maddy and Caitlyn looked at each other. Caitlyn shrugged. "Uh cool. Thanks?"

When one of the older ones asked "Do you guys smoke pot?"

"Yeah?"

"See I told you these guys were cool" one of the children said.

"We just bought some, were about to go home and smoke. Do you have any chronic?"

"Actually yeah we have just a little bit left from earlier. A decent nug at least."

"Cool, we only have shake. I haven't smoked any chronic in a while. You're going to smoke it with us."

When they got to the house there was garbage piled up against the wall and in big red spray paint it said "Don't put your trash here!" with an arrow pointing to the pile. The kids

all took positions around the living room in front of a dead TV and broke out the pot and started inspecting it, showing it to each other.

"You said you have pot!" One of them said accusingly.

"Yeah! You said you had some!" another one acting as the choir.

"Yeah yeah, I do uh here let me get it. Do you have a piece?"

The eldest handed her a pipe and she packed the fat nug into the bowl and loaded the keef on top and the kid instructed Maddy to take a hit.

Cait took a small hit next and passed it.

"My moms cool. She can make us pancakes in the morning" he said.

Maddy and Caitlyn didn't notice any adults around, anywhere.

They started packing another bowl with the stuff they bought after the kind was cached and Caitlyn stared at the spray paint on the wall when one of the kids noticed. "Our dad says we're moving soon. This place sucks."

Just then the front door slid open and another walked in carrying a suitcase about as big as him.

"Hi!"

"Hey! Jasons' back!" The kids got really excited and popped out of their seats to greet their compatriot.

"Whoa hey you guys! I just got back from hanging out with my cousin." He started explaining he was in a famous band from California."

"I've never heard of them."

"Me neither. What kind of music do they play?"

"Like punk or rock I guess."

They asked if Maddy had ever heard of the band.

"Oh, shit yeah. I used to listen to them all the time in High School" and Maddy started humming.

"Whatever." The kids were skeptical.

Jason brought out a picture of himself with them at a themed medieval restaurant. "It was so cool, we went to this really neat restaurant where they had sword battles and all the waiters wore armor."

"Whoa rad let me see." The kids gathered around to inspect the photo.

"This is Maddy and what'd you say your name was?"

"Cat."

"Yeah they're staying here tonight. My mom might make us pancakes in the morning. They're cool though."

Maddy and Caitlyn passed out on couches and the kids disappeared into more or less actual holes in the walls.

When Maddy woke up there was a very large, bald white man with a swastika tattooed on his arm and 666 tattooed on his forehead wearing a wife beater and a big happy grin passed out with his torso halfway in the hallway, his legs in the bedroom, and a bare mattress on the floor behind him.

The kids were playing happily like kids, their mom in the kitchen cooking.

"That's our dad! Are you going to stay for breakfast?"

Maddy looked down the hallway past the broken, peeling linoleum floor out the back door to see a yard piled high with detritus and appliances.

"Actually I think we really have to be going, we need to find a ride."

"Our uncle can give you one."

Caitlyn looked at the kid plainly. "How long have you know him for?"

"Oh, a couple of days."

She declined.

Pipe Dreams

In town they went to a food co-op and were digging through the trash when they see a guy in the back wearing an apron when Caitlyn instructs Maddy to "Go ask if he can give us anything. Maybe some expired shit, rabbit scraps or whatever." He came back with a small crate of the gnar. They got herbal fruit tonic with raspberry leaves, rose hips, nettles, lemon juice, ginger and honey. It was a beautiful red and was amazing by Revelation unpasteurized juice and some natty miso pastes that smelled divine, soy and barley. It smelled like cheese or truffles.

They got a ride to the Grim Harvest Office which was a house literally situated underneath an overpass where they published a magazine called 'Portland Oregon Resources

Natural'. They met a guy there named Shrub who was running for congress. He handed them crates of kale, oranges, yams, coffee, tea, chocolate, pastries, old bread and quinoa. Ellis Dee drove them out there in a jeep.

Cruising slowly through the redwood forest ferns and hundred foot second and third growth giving way to larger and older trees it gave a person a sort of shrinking effect as they rolled up onto the gravel logging road. It was a seven mile hike in.

They loaded about seventy pounds of food into each pickle shaped, internal frame hiking backpack and stepped beside the locked gate. There was a set of bongo's swinging from Maddy's pack he'd gotten from Shrub to give to the sitters and Ellis returned to town.

They made there way through the woods, the air was misty and cool. Climbing in elevation with each mile it smelled like Christmas. Dew clung to bushy tree branches.

On the road with white marking paint someone had written "Go Home Freddies!". Maddy explained "That's what they call Forest Service Officers. Although it's kind of a secret we're usually on friendly terms with them. They are usually as passionate about the forest as we are."

She asked "how many are there?"

"We don't talk about numbers. How many platforms there are, how many people in the sits."

"Then how do we know when we get there?" she said jovially.

"Westward of the moon, Eastward toward sunrise" he said reciting some goddamn poetry. She punched him in the arm. The sun began to set and Maddy called out animal noises she didn't recognize to identify the platforms.

They rendezvoused at Sunset. Anansi & Raven helped unload supplies. Sunset was the name of the tree.

The sit called down and asked if they could be let down to walk around for a while. They had been up there for weeks and needed someone to take their place before they could get down.

To set up the platform they used bows to shoot a climbing rope around a branch which someone would climb using gear eventually raising more ropes into place, and finally plywood. The trunk was surrounded halfway down with a barbed wire device that would allegedly fall on someone trying to climb up the tree using spikes. Theoretically only by being let down a rope could someone access the platform.

Maddy instructed Caitlyn how to use a harness and explained how the equipment held you until you were ready to pull yourself up another length until you got to the top under your own strength.

At two hundred and fifty feet there's quite the view; on the inside platform someone had written "Go Feral" with a black Sharpie.

There were small red squirrels called voles the sitters were documenting that little was known about. High in the trees literally an entire separate eco-system existed. If the sitters could document the existence of them they could use the law to halt the sale.

One lunatic was setting up ropes between the trees and practicing climbing between them and was stoked about how cool he thought the idea was. Maddy thought it looked mad that high up.

Later down below they were smoking a joint around the fire and a woman named Muellein was telling Caitlyn how if the sale was ever canceled she would throw a Tequila party.

"With a harness?" Cat prodded.

"Nope."

They shared coffee and smoked salmon for supper, with bits of cheese and bread. The high protein of the salmon and natural oils were a boon in the soggy undergrowth of the forest. Cait tried earlier to dry her socks by the fire but they only got smoked out and were rank and soggy. Putting them back on she sandwiched two tarps, sleeping bags and wool blankets together and got in under a tree called Grandmother.

Both A Lender, And A Borrower Be

Slowly the stars fade. Caitlyn woke up with the sun poking through the forest and sounds of woodpeckers and cheerful humming as Maddy made coffee.

Bringing a guitar out a woman with raven black hair told Maddy she was a folk singer and was talking to them about water issues when she realized she'd lost her stash.

"Oh! Have you guys seen my stash anywhere?"

"No."

"Uh-uh."

They looked around and couldn't find it.

"Did you check your pockets?"

"Yeah it's not there."

...Later in the truck Maddy asked Cat "Did you take her pot?"

"No! What the fuck is wrong with you?" She was telling the truth. "It was probably wood sprites."

They hiked back the main road to wait for their ride which was waiting for them and drove into the city.

Growing up in Springfield

Getting off at the College street exit they walked by Max's tavern. A narrow, old brick building with a wooden bar. There were a few tables against the wall inside.

They came down around the University when a fuzzy old dude in welding goggles asked if they'd ever read the worlds funniest joke book.

"Bufo!" Caitlyn wrapped her arms around him and he smiled.

There was a cop shop on the corner and a fat bald cop was surveying the place making Maddy nervous.

"We're fucked."

"No we're not. Calm down."

She was poking around in the weekly when a headline caught her eye. "Apparently two million dollars worth of logging equipment and SUV's were set on fire last night."

"What no way?" Maddy said smiling.

"Yeah and a person fell at the sit, Mullenin."

Maddy took the paper inspecting it. There was silence for about half an hour...

"There is gonna be a show at the theater tonight" Caitlyn said.

The Mads was looking across the street. He saw something that looked familiar.

"Hey is that?"

"What pioneer guy? What about him?"

"It looks familiar." A life size bronze statue titled 'Pioneer guy' was wearing a buckskin cap right inside the gate.

"Maybe we can use the showers if we sneak into the dorms." Caitlyn looked like she hadn't changed out of her bra in six months.

"Ooh I like the way you think. Good idea." Maddy said.

"I know where to go."

They walked through campus and came across a building Caitlyn easily approached and caught the door someone was holding for her, which she in turn held open for Maddy. Cat walked up two flights of stairs and told Maddy to wait in the hall for a minute before returning.

"It's safe, come on."

They walked in and pulled shut a curtain around them in the large unit and Caitlyn looked into his eyes and smiled, then pulled her top off. They turned on the water and Maddy started washing and was kind of paranoid about getting caught when his heart jumped. He heard the voices of two women. They entered the room and immediately got in the shower right next to them with only the curtain separating.

Maddy looked at her and Cat smiled and whispered "It's ok they're cool. I already talked to them."

Outside it was cold and foggy, steam radiators kept it warm and dry inside.

Caitlyn had struck up a conversation with one of the women and followed her back to her dorm room. They were ignoring Maddy so he invited himself to explore the dorms. Downstairs below ground there were laundry services and he wandered down creepy dark hallways lit with fluorescent light while Caitlyn hung out upstairs with one of the girls. Her roommate had gotten dressed and gone out.

There were passages connecting all the dorms and halls. Many of the doors were locked and marked with triangles within circles, with the initials 'CD'.

In one of the main rooms was a foosball table and a tiny amphitheater with vending machines against the matte black walls. Off a hallway there was a room with a shitty couch. The room was accented with primary colors juxtaposed against a brown background. Some one had scribbled 'xyzzzy' on the wall. It connected to a series of other rooms, one filled with bicycles, another with mattress. He was barefoot and took a door which led outside. It locked behind him and he wandered around in the snow for a while until coming back to front door.

He buzzed upstairs and after few minutes the door opened and he found the two of them upstairs sitting quietly next to each other.

They had ordered a pizza half pb&j, half cheese and psychedelic mushrooms by request on the down low.

Maddy had some and after a while playing with Japanese action figures Cait said "I feel like we've all fucked. Like I mean this feels really intense."

The girls both looked at each other and smiled "Oh." He pretended not to hear and the girl told them she had class in the morning and needed to study. They showed themselves out and leaving campus saw Bufo sitting on the patio of one of the bars having a pint.

They took a bus out to Saint Vinney's and got Cait a new sleeping bag and a pack.

Caitlyn was grouchy "Do you have any weed left?"

He shook his head no.

"Ugh, fuck! I wanna get stoned. Let's go down to Whiteaker and see if we can score anything. How much money do you have?"

He handed over seven bucks and she combined it with hers. Twenty one.

It was dark out but still early. Probably just after six.

They walked towards Whiteaker and passed some food carts and came across a group of punks with dogs and scowls on their face.

"Arg state yer' business!" they were flying Jolly Rogers as patches on their gear.

"Hey what's up kids. Do you know where we could find some cannabis?"

"What choo need brother?" one of the guys said with a toothless grin.

She shot him a look.

"Hey I'm just fucking with you sister. What's up? My names Riley how do you do?" He extended his hand and pulled it hand away immediately after slapping hers and snapped his fingers. He looked a little drunk.

"We're looking for a dub bro. Do you think you could help us out?"

"Check this out. I got something better" and pulled out blotter with tarot pattern all over it.

"I got sheets and sheets of acid. Hahaha he just took eight of those motherfuckers and he's still ticking!" pointing to his friend.

"Is it?"

"It's DOC actually but its really good. Have you ever tried it before?"

"We're good dude. So do guys have any ganja or what?"

"Yeah, hold on a sec."

"Hey let me see the bud" Riley said turning to one of his road dogs, who protested a little."

He picked a few buds out and laid them out next to them on the bench, trying to be discrete. "What did you say you want?"

"Twenty."

"How's that look to you?"

One the kids said "No man that's too much" pulling one of the nugs out of the pile.

"That's fine, whatever" Cat said dropping the twenty next to it.

"Hey be cool, they're family" another guy said pulling a nug out of the sack tossing it back onto the pile.

Just then a police officer walked up and asked them what was going on. There were sheets of DOC on the pavement in front of them. The neon marquee of a mini-mart lit up the hurricane

fence behind them. Caitlyn clean from her shower and wearing the outfit she stole quickly spoke "My boyfriend and I just finished finals. We're out relaxing before the show tonight."

Without a word the cop motioned for them to go and Cait reached down grabbing the ganja stuffing it in her pocket and walking away down an alley with Maddy in tow.

"What the fuck!?"

"I don't know! It was just reflex" she turned around and the cop paid them no mind while he dug into the kids. "Fuck, just keep walking."

They walked through a labyrinth of alleys Cat navigated with ease with a guitar Maddy had taken from the bomb shelter and came to a free wall. Cat rolled a joint from roaches she picked up off the concrete, mixing in some Datura she had picked earlier from a bush.

They walked out towards Autzen to crawl into their sleeping bags, camping in high grass under an oak tree a few hundred feet from the river, away from the main trails at Alton Baker. They got breakfast at the Sevey's the next morning and Caitlyn told him she wanted to go to the library and check her email.

Sitting at one of the computers she waved him over and told him to sit down. "I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to do for the winter. I was thinking maybe I could house sit for someone but I haven't been able to find anything. What's the deal with that wwoofing thing you were talking about earlier? Would you want to come with me if I did that?" Maddy couldn't imagine life without her, almost suprised she asked. As if it were a technicality.

They made some calls and ended up hitchhiking north towards Blain.

Any Time Now

They spent the winter in Canada along the Rocky Mountain ridge in a small town called Silverton where it reached forty below zero at night; having taken a hiking trail through the Kootenies from Washington state to British Columbia.

Maddy spent afternoons felling standing dead, bucking and splitting it for the woodstove inside the octagonal cabin they were renting. He used a hundred year old American steel cross cut saw, about five feet long to do the work. The steel was soft unlike the Swedish bow saws which were very stiff. He found about six or eight of them underneath the cabin.

They convinced an anarchist draft dodger to rent it to them after the neighbors suggested they might get along since they had similar politics. Their agreement was to cover the phone bill for the cabin which came to about thirty bucks a month. There was no electricity however. Some of the homes in the village which were very modern utilized micro-hydro the co-op had installed for themselves.

They burned oil lamps for light at night. Two would keep the shadows at bay.

Occasionally they would go for hikes with their neighbors and pick elderberrys and things. Maddy got Cait pregnant and she started learning about herbs from a crone who taught her how to make an emmenagogue. Maddy started using herbs to make absinthe using a still he made out of an old canning pot.

Using a big check they got stacking hay they bought a box of pork and stored it outside under an overturned iron bathtub, supplementing that with rice, beans and johnny cakes on a daily basis. Sometimes there was honey.

Down the hill seven kilometers a general store sold frozen, grass fed ground beef for about eight bucks a pound and between that, beer, cheese and bread, going to store was a real treat. The nearest town was another forty out.

One of their neighbors kept a little over a hundred goats and had a freezer full of billy's he would let them have. The meat was tough and gamey. Maddy boiled it with some elfin mushrooms which were allegedly not particularly poisons if cooked and eaten in small amounts. They were stoked however when Jaybee showed them some morels growing along a stone fence. He was too timid to eat any. His brother bought rice and oil in bulk and illegally fished in the lake frequently inviting them to share the salmon with him. After meals he would load a bowl.

They bathed about once a month in an iron tub which had to be filled before you could light a fire under it to heat the water, or the enamel would crack.

One particular afternoon Maddy had finished stacking wood for his elderly neighbors who used to teach at the Quaker school and he was being fed homemade bread and lentil soup. They were telling him all about 1920's socialists and anarchists they were friends with in their youth. Famous names he had never heard of.

The soup was amazing and he asked her about the recipe. "Oh you know know a little of this a little of that and some things I swept up of the floor" the old man's wife told her while he hummed King Wenscles.

"Oh, but there's something else. It's so good, what is it?"

"Ginger maybe."

"Feeding body and spirit" she said offering him a plate of butter for his homemade bread.

They were lucky to get on the milk list and bottles were left at the post office twice a week. On the way home Maddy picked up theirs and left a few loonies and toonies behind and checked the freebox in the community center. He walked back towards the cabin which was a good three clicks off the main road in the middle of the forest. Snow was deep all around and occasionally they could hear blasting where they tried to keep the road open. Cait was listening to CBC radio in the lookout

loft when he came in. She shouted down to him, Zen had passed. "The last time I saw him he was sitting naked on a stump, covered in mud sucking from a rusty fifty gallon drum of homemade NOS" she said wistfully.

The wind cried high and wild against the door, and blew through the cracks of the uninsulated cabin.

Two weeks later Maddy had hiked seven kilometers down the mountain to the store and was on his way back up when he chose to rest for a moment in a snow drift. He felt so sleepy and not at all cold. As he sat down he remembered those were the early signs of hypothermia and forced himself up when truck pulled up. It was Mack.

Legend has it he showed up in September and just started digging. He lives in a weird hole in the ground house he dug a for himself and grows cabbages and things for the whole town using only horse and human labor.

"Hey, how about a ride?"

"I thought you didn't like me that much?"

"I don't but it's easier than dealing with a body."

Maddy smiled and got in the cab, grateful. He had two pounds of frozen beef along with a six pack and some mustard and stuff. He was feeling a little homesick and wanted to have an American thanksgiving.

Tea candles lit up the octagon and a yellow alabaster votive made one of them very pretty.

Rick and the arborist were having a concerned discussion about the pine beetles that were consuming the forest. Normally their numbers were kept in check by the cold winters but it hadn't been getting nearly as cold for years.

Rick Marin says "Well I just had thanksgiving a few weeks ago so this had better be good."

Cait set out a spread of lettuce, onions, tomatoes, ketchup and mustard.

Jaybee was stocky, had a large beard and was laughing at everyone's jokes, otherwise distracted with his burger.

"You got any fixin's?" Rick asked, being handed one of the first burgers from the cast iron pan resting on top of the woodstove and Cat directed him to the stuff.

Maddy proceeded to tell him the story with the four part harmony just like it was when their landlord interrupted them "Oh yeah. I was there man" with a weird grin.

The following few weeks they heard footsteps around their cabin, a local kid who was on probation for meth had been threatening to call immigration after they had been there six months. Something spooked them and the following year they returned to Eugene-Town. Before they left they asked a neighbor if they could buy any pot from him and handed him a hundred dollar bill they made splittling wood. He returned with a little less than half a pound.

Always Here, Sometimes There

In the foothills of Cascades Kobb had a little place out in the country. They got a ride into town and walked several miles through the afternoon sun.

As they got closer a sign off Thunder Rd. said: "No Trespassing - We will shoot you" There were more as they got closer up the queer street. "Last chance to turn around" They crossed a

small creek swimming with trout and over a wooden bridge to find Skinner relaxing on a lounge chair reading a copy of Psychedelic American magazine. A sign in the yard said "Know Parking".

Large trucks were decimating a mountain in the background and rumbled past the ranchette at fifteen minute intervals.

"Sorry we never made it to the Halloween party, maybe next time around."

"There won't be a next time, but there may be a new time" he said and started talking about the moon or something. "We usually don't see the moon all month because of clouds or overcast but this month with it's clear nights we got to see all the phases of the moon and two full moons. Spectacular, and humbling for we see there is great stuff going on apart from our oh, so important lives." She wasn't exactly sure what he meant.

"You remember Maddy don't you? I ran into him at the Litmus Test last year?"

"Hope you didn't hurt Maddy when you ran into him. We got meats and eats and meets and greets all in one."

"We brought a bottle of Absinthe" said Caitlyn and she presented a cobalt blue 500ml glass bottle with an attached metal hinged cork. It was a two hundred year old french recipe made with wildcrafted herbs and distilled after a full moon cycle.

"Absinthe makes the heart go yonder."

He was dressed up and Caitlyn asked him "Are you a lifeguard Mr. K?"

"Non-lifeguard. I make sure you get in the water, involvement! Axe me no questions says the logger and I will saw you no lies. I see, I see said the blind man who picked up his hammer and saw. You can't buck the party system. Whatever party's in

power dance party, cocktail party, dinner party, tea party. The more the costumes change, the more the parties stay the same. You can take that to the fog bank."

Men unloaded cases of beer and tossed them in an old iron tub towards the porch filled with ice. A giant neon bus rolled up conveying all manner of women and children inside and on top waving and grinning.

A man in a top hat wearing a jumpsuit hopped out and started talking with a beautiful, kind woman who shouted "Who wants to play croquet!?" She was louder than she looked. She looked at Caitlyn who wandered over and they began to set up.

The man in the top hat was showing the new carpet he had installed in the bus. It was very, very loud. A black background with neon Pollock style impressions on top. "What do you think?" he asked.

"You could make jumpsuits out of the material and when you laid on the floor you'd be invisible" Maddy said thoughtfully. The Queen nodded thoughtfully.

"Just one idea in ten thousand" he shrugged and sauntered off towards the stage when the woman asked Caitlyn if she could roll a joint.

Cat responded enthusiastically "Sure!" and proceeded to grab a pinch of pot off one of the picnic tables and roll the finest joint she ever had, handing it off.

"What the fuck is this?" the ol' country gal tore it in half and tossed it over her shoulder. "Is there someone else around here that can roll a joint?"

Caitlyn began to stammer "But I, really tried. It's nice. I even put a crutch in it?"

"A regular 60's joint" she said rolling her eyes at Cat.

Caitlyn was beside herself "Damn."

Maddy tried to hit up Tophat for five bucks.

"Nada dude. Nope."

"What about the yogurt fortune?" Maddy asked.

"Other side of the family."

"Oh" said Maddy staring into his beer balefully.

Caitlyn was smoking out someone who said he made buttons for a living. He looked familiar but everyone does after a while and Maddy was talking to a woman who used to be involved with the light shows.

"A glass clock face is perfect, vegetable oil and you combine it with cheap fabric dye and rubbing alcohol over an overhead projector, you see?"

Skinner pranced around a flagpole with his trombone while another man pulled a cooler out of the back of the bus filled with little tubs of ice cream and people began to dig in. A grill was being tended to and all manner of meats were being turned and pulled near the beer tub. Suddenly there was a loud explosion. The ice cream man had lit a cannon and shredded newspaper rained down and Kobb got on the Mic as the band set up behind him.

Kobb was talking about fine grey lines and meshes in rhymes.

Without saying a word Caitlyn and Maddy just looked at each other both went for a bottle of homemade elderberry wine on the table. One of the kids grabbed the meatloaf off the table and shoved it into the cannon. The Amish looking ice cream man told the kids to stand back, he was watching closely. The meatloaf hit everything and the kids cheered wildly.

"We went to the future once, fifty years ago. It's in the movie" said Kobb.

"What is this movie that everyone keeps talking about?" Maddy asked.

"The one that they're making remember?" said Caitlyn embarrassed.

The drums started playing an extended cosmic solo in the background.

A woman was talking to Maddy "It was really tight culturally back then and a lot less violent."

"Where's the bus?" Cat asked Mr. K.

"It's just a little further."

"There?"

"Here, now" he showed them the bus by the hedges. The device sat perched in the console of Beyond, wired into the 12 volt system which automatically spun on whenever the bus was operated casting the bus in a pale blue glow.

"What's the name of your bus mean?"

"It means beyond the art and the acid treat others with kindness. Forget the entanglement of love, forget not to practice charity" said Kobb handing them the device.

"If you don't leave now you hafta stay over night." Kobb wasn't having anybody drive 'om after dark. Caitlyn started explaining her theory to him "The world is chaos because of multiple trips. The solution to global harmony therefor is one really huge trip to include everyone that's tripping apart and sync up the world."

"You're either on the earth or off the earth" said Kobb.

"Only the poor are doomed; the rich will find a way to get by" Cat said with a melancholy expression.

"Yet we all end up the same" he replied.

Maddy passed out on a couch inside when he thought he heard voices, When he came to angels were standing over him singing so he sung along "You must be an angel."

"How many fingers am I holding up?" asked Cat. Maddy started counting "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 all good hippies go to heaven."

"He's worse than we thought, he still thinks we're hippies."

"What a sweet song."

"It's quite the ornate number."

"It shows."

"Gee."

He had a cut on his forehead.

"Oh this is bad go get the iodine."

"What's your name?"

"I'm Simon."

"What man?"

"I hafta get the keys to the submarine."

"There are no keys to the bus darling. It's push button."

"Boop!" He started giggling and poked Cat in the nose.

They brought him into the checkered tile kitchen. It was the only dry room in the house. Maye said "Someones going to hafta stay up with him tonight to make sure cats don't eat his face."

Maddy musta been feelin' better he thought to his self. Cat don't eat people.

"Maddy this isn't a dream. This time it's real."

The Bar On The Roof

That night ate they ate a lovely salad of baby greens from the garden with soup and bread from the large wood fired clay oven with a well aged, fifty year old red. Outside a storm raged. Safe in the house the rain kept pouring and a Johnny Cash LP seemed to fit perfectly.

Kobb was talking about the weather "well, first it snowed like crazy then started raining madly and the wind went all howly and the trees shook and the branches fell and the chickens panicked and the creek is high but the people don't mind because they are high too."

"How high's the water Momma?" Cat leaned over whispering to Maddy.

"Not nearly as high as me, but it's rising. The creek is looking pretty swollen" he said.

"That's not the only thing." She pinched him under the table and he held back a smile, embarrassed.

"Barbed wire weeping potatoes & razor blade roses again, my favorite" Maddy said chewing with his mouth open.

"Got a phone call this weekend from somebody at the Fair named Bucket and he was telling me about how he could have a whole new position created at the Fair. How would you like to be Historical Continuity Coordinator?" he says. "You could have your own crew. Would you like that?"

"The Crew?" Maddy said. "Who the hell are you anyway?"

After the dishes were cleared Kobb told them "The stars tell the story, they notice something and that's the way it's gonna be. Hey listen! Would you like to hear a story? It's a clean story, in fact it has a bath involved in it."

"The cure is biochemical" said Curious, he was reading a copy of Mycology Unmystified. "You can't adulterate mushrooms. Beer, Bread, Society we owe it all to fungus. It's all medicine, no one has a right to keep them from the average citizen." Meanwhile Caitlyn was looking at some pulp comic book about a black freighter while Curious and Kobb continued talking "LSD seems to resist misuse."

There was a jug of plum wine on the table and a few drops were slipped into it. At some point tiny cups were proffered.

Kobb started working the stereo and put in a cassette tape. "He likes to record everything" Caitlyn said.

"I like to think I'm ahead of my time" said Kobb

That evening the grass shimmered in the fading sunlight and everything felt as it should be in the universe. Now he knew how it really felt, it was like stepping into a beautiful painting you'd looked at all your life as a child. The landscape rippled.

High in Mountains

The next morning they made their between the large glacial erratics out onto the highway to hitch a ride.

Caitlyn started singing “How nice it would be to marry a man who lives out his days in a rusty old van!” and Maddy started laughing as they crossed the bridge going over the creek and an old truck turned round the bend.

Chapter 6

Field Trip To Nirvana

It's Still The Water

They got a ride with someone out to the Dexter Lake Club, ate some fantastic burgers and stuck their thumbs out towards Eugene when just after a few minutes a creepy short bus pulled up. Covered in rust spots and primer it had no windows in the back and there was a large crack running through the windshield.

"Oh fuck" Caitlyn muttered with a stiff upper lip thinking of her friend Amy's words "Choose your rides carefully." She leaned in towards Maddy and told him "Look, when this guy pulls up just ask where he's going and then we'll tell him we are headed somewhere else. If it gets weird run."

A couple of young ladies put their head out the window and another few pulled open the sliding door and invited them in with smiles and enthusiasm. They looked at each other and Caitlyn shrugged with a smile "you never know."

None of the women looked older than twenty except maybe Sharkbait the sweet Marine who'd just gotten home from Afghanistan. There was Miera a short, horny eighteen year old with dreads, Wolfie a red haired skinny reformed hippy and Michaela a beautiful blond sweetheart.

"Where you guys headed?" Miera who was driving asked.

"we're trying to get a ride to the country fair" Cat responded.

"Dudes that's awesome!" said Sharky looking at them.

"Cool, what's up?"

"You just got one if you want but we're heading to a regional outside Olympia first. The fair isn't for a couple of days you know."

"Totally."

"Hey do you guys have any pot?" Sharkbait turned around asking them.

"What do you need?" Cait responded without missing a beat.

"I dunno we were thinking of getting like sixty bucks worth?"

Cat nodded.

"Hey Michaela hand me the money." The girls fished around and handed Caitlyn some cash and she reached into an oven bag and pulled out two massive handfuls of bud.

"Do you have something to put it in?" Caitlyn asked handing the pile of ganja over to Wolfie.

"Oh shit dude, yeah hold on."

"Hey. Hey Sharkbait! Get me one of those bags!" and Sharky pullgrabbed a plastic grocery bag off the floor and poured the pot inside dropping a few nugs on the carpet.

"Whoa, thanks. You didn't have to give us so much."

"You didn't have to give us a ride" Cat said smiling and they resumed playing spin the bottle in the back on shag carpet. It didn't really matter that the van was rolling around because they were all taking turns making out with each other anyway, the bottle was just a prop.

"You two are in luck. We would have left yesterday but we had to wait for Michaela to get off work. Do you guys have tickets already?"

"Nah, we were just going to get some at the gate."

Miera looked back at Shark and Shark looked at Maddy.

"They don't sell at the gate sister. You're going to have to buy them in town."

"Hey Miera, can we stop at supermarket on the way?"
Sharkbait shouted to the front of the van.

"Yeah we need to get some more water anyway."

"Cool, thanks" Cat said, counting out her money thinking they were running short.

They stumbled out of the vehicle at a gas station parking lot to use the restrooms and Caitlyn noticed a tea cup super glued to the nose of a thrashed minibus in the driveway and Cait asked Miera while she was filling up jugs.

A tea bag sat in the cup along with a brown liquor of indeterminate origin which sloshed around as the van cruised town, but never spilled.

"We're going in disguise. It's supposed to be a coffee mug. It actually used to belong to this quadriplegic cartoonist" Miera explained to Caitlyn while they waited for the others as she filled up water jugs.

"The stuff in Ashland is way better" Caitlyn smirked.

They got a bag of day old bagels in Olympia and climbed up the road and parked near bus village.

Michaela laid on top of him like he was mattress and just fell asleep exhausted while Cat made out all night with some of the other girls.

The next morning where a hood rat in tie dye was arguing with another dude "The rainbows here don't have any power. They know better than to fuck with us in Devilsburg."

"That's because you're a bunch of fucking crazy rednecks."

"Exactly" he told him. Cat carried some of the food they'd got in town and brought it up to the main storage tent.

An aging carnival worker invited them to dinner.

Later sitting in a circle after getting settled with about ten of them, Carrik, February, the cheshire cat... rain drizzled down from the hundred foot high tops of second generation pine.

They were sharing coffee that was indistinguishable from rain water while some guy screamed about "Angry redneck lesbian ninjas, in the woods" and could be heard every so often while the carnie explained how the best act he ever saw was a monkey dressed like Elvis. It danced to a cassette tape and had a cardboard guitar... Maddy realized the coffee was rainwater.

"It's my job to take peoples money by making them feel good."

They overheard some punks laughing to each other saying their favorite thing was tripping hippies into the mud and hearing the hippies reply "I love you brother."

The guy who was ranting earlier about lesbian ninjas was now hollering about a one inch square hole carburetor in the top of his water jug Caitlyn had made when she stabbed it with a steak knife and twisted the blade 90 degrees.

Cat tried to distract him before she realized it was her he was mad at. "I've never had real cheese before!"

"What?" He was cutting up cheese to add to a pot of pond water and macaroni.

"Poor little ghetto child" he said with a sorry grin. "Angry redneck lesbian ninjas. In the woods! No techno music!" He seemed to be repeating something he'd heard and was either

himself trying to reconcile the statement with reality or thought it was extremely funny.

It was rainy and foggy and after dinner when Maddy took a walk to find dry fuel before dark.

He came across some old man in a tepee and Maddy stopped to say what's up. The man looked like he was waiting for someone; anyone really. The man had a fancy mustache beard combo and Maddy sat down and shared a bowl. The old man proceeded to tell him he'd been going to gatherings since 'the beginning'. Maddy inquired further and the old dude pulled out a small package and unfolded it revealing a sacred t-shirt which had on it the ancient, original charter.

"Whoa" Maddy said, curiouser and curiouser; expecting the gypsy to be full of shit.

"This is one of three left in existence" he told Maddy as he read the silk-screened fabric.

It told of a time in 1972 when the tribes would buy three thousand acres of land and 'gather'. "We wanted to get all the communes and co-ops together and just see what happened."

Caitlyn had passed off the vial she had been saving all winter.

Laughter was quickly replaced with the sound of the woods filling up with magic as the light outside grew dark.

"Hey! We don't all wear potato sacks! How dare you, some of us are naked and covered in mud!"

A young dude went around with a small one inch vial around his neck and stopped by front gate dosing people by request with an eye dropper.

Maddy found Caitlyn looking for rumors and they overheard the punks tripping hippies again and one of them called back "tolerating you brother!"

Around the bliss pit a few folks harmonized and played 'Lovin' You' {By Loving Spoonful}, but the real killer jam was a super extended version of 'No woman, No Cry' which lasted about one and a half hours with the bluegrass standard 'I'll Fly Away' thrown in the middle like sprinkles on a cake.

Divine, Right?

Over several streams and through meadows across fallen logs at The Naked Bakery in The Woods the howling grew louder until you could hear it almost all the way to the front gate.

In the main meadow and all over the road in fact, a crazed man wearing a dress is screaming that he is from the future and has a Public Service Announcement.

A woman came up and presented Maddy with a crown of flowers. He was wearing the skirt and the crown was gorgeous. He'd never gotten anything like it before and couldn't have been more proud. "I spent all day on it." Maddy put it on and skipped merrily the rest of the gathering.

Walking back from the main kitchen he came across a couple of fellow travelers on the road and asked them playfully if it was the hippie public transit line.

"Yeah, evening commute but the bus hasn't run on time in years."

Someone wandered up behind them and said "It isn't supposed to run on time. It's supposed to hang out in the station."

"Fuck you goofy god damn hippies" said one of the women and ignoring him she returned to their story.

Mosquitos were biting everyone and everyone was high on LSD; it wasn't long before the mosquitos were too.

"We decided it would be faster to just walk."

Safely tucked away in the large van Sharkbait was complaining that things were falling apart pretty quickly. She said they were likely splitting up and not going to fair tomorrow and asked if MadCat wanted to take the van with them.

"Fuck yeah, fuck yeah" Cait said.

"What do you want to give me for this?"

"How much will it take?"

"A miracle" she responded handing her the keys.

It smelled like dog inside the van.

Crossing The Threshold

Broadcasting Dueling Banjo's through the dark into the woods as a safety precaution along with some narrator reading out the entire Constitution from a promotional Union 76 album Maddy was taking notes on a new production of The Wizard of Oz wherein the witch is tried for genocide and war crimes. Caitlyn was passed out in the back.

Plugged into the van's electrical system a porch light lit up the scene as Maddy made the notes when Motherfucking Squirrel wandered up and made Maddy tell her the story of the magic bus until the sun came up. She loves that story.

The next afternoon Maddy walked down to the river where a group had gathered. He kept the skirt on along with a shirt to hide his chest but other women were more brave and there were a handful swimming naked, happily and playfully. No one

bothered them and it made Maddy smile, he wished he could be so brave.

Sitting on a log in the sun drying out while it was still warm outside he recognized a familiar face "Oh my go...odness! JayBee!" He lept up and with a small wave he spread out his arms and Maddy went in for a hug.

"Hey! Buddy! How are you doing?" Maddy was delighted to see him and he had a big beautiful smile on his face, glad he could be a friend. They sat together for a while next to the river catching up.

After a minute Maddy asked "Do you have any ganja on you?" they had left theirs in the van.

"Well, I don't know. Let me see." With a chuckle Jaybee pulled out a pinkish glass pipe and filled it with some herb.

They lit it with a magnifying glass. The sun hid behind some clouds and a cool wind blew through the trees. It would be getting cold soon and they walked back up together past A-camp, main gate and parted ways.

Maddy continued up the trail to see what his friends were up to. He visited main kitchen and there were a bunch of teenagers sitting around and Maddy mentioned someone had better get something started if anyone was going to eat at a reasonable hour. He proceeded to gather some fuel and get a fire started while rummaging through the storage tent for inspiration.

The kids were sitting around, laughing at Maddy making fun of the fact that there wasn't any dry fuel around. The fire pit was set up very poorly and frustrating him. "Hey, it would be really great if any of you wanted to help, just saying."

The continued to taunt and tease being incredibly rude and Maddy simply had enough. There was no point in dealing with these people.

He simply walked away. Maddy had a friend who was camping in Kiddie Village, the only other camp set up at the moment besides main gate which was overrun with drinking. Someone had brought a gallon of rum and the boys were rude. Maddy was more interested in keeping his mood and decided to see what they had going for dinner.

Walking up the trail he traded someone a pack of clear rolling papers for a joint after a little cajoling and walked into the camp. He saw and said hi to his friend who also drove a short bus.

She was a nervous because although some folks had built a lovin' oven for them it wasn't dry yet and they didn't even have a fire pit. The sun was beginning to slowly set upon the village. Shocked, Maddy quickly offered and proceeded to dig a fire trench about a solid foot deep with two short, narrow sloping ramps into it and then filled them back in with loose soil digging with his hands and eventually a flat rock he'd dug up.

It was a little hard pulling some of the stones out which were firmly entrenched but he managed all the same setting them aside, later lining the pit with them.

His friend had gathered some firewood during this time and they were glad to be together for the moment, it was a grand feeling.

Together they began to stack some kindling in the pit and lit the fire. It quickly grew, heat from the stones radiating back on it. Within minutes they were burning sticks as large as your wrist and were able to set a pot on the rocks.

Maddy pulled some of the loose dirt out of one of the ramps and it sucked air under the pot raging the blaze. They hadn't any food stocked yet so Maddy jogged out the trail onto the main path and went to raid the main kitchen supply, figuring no one would say anything but not entirely sure about it.

When he got there the teenagers had taken over building their own fire and it was a fucking mess. They encountered the

same issues he had earlier but Maddy said nothing. He was secretly very pleased to see them put in their place. They looked so stupid, those smartmouth little shitheads arguing over their pile.

He quickly dodged into the storage tent and grabbed a few bags of pasta and cans of things putting them into a bag grabbing a tank of water as well.

He had spent a better part of the day with Caitlyn gathering it from upriver where the water ran clear and fast. They had already treated it with a few drops of bleach and had a decent supply which all camps would use until they set up a water system, which didn't end up working. The supply only lasted a day or so.

The load was very heavy and he had to stop and rest for a moment every so often struggling to carry the bags as far as possible without stopping. A miracle of sorts happened when he met up with a lady named Tallboy who helped carry the load and together they made it. She was neither tall, nor a boy.

Upon arriving Tallboy said she was glad to be a help and Maddy was so grateful. In the intervening time some other gals had arrived and brought with them wine and a large bag of powdered cheese for macaroni.

With some canned pasta sauce Cat had earlier contributed to the main storage tent and a cup of the powdered cheese they made up a very large pot of very delicious pasta.

Maddy wasn't sure where Cat was and it didn't bother him. She was in fact sitting topless in the mud at the Naked Bakery exchanging massages with the other hippies, pretending she wasn't hungry. Once it got dark someone made a fire and they argued communally about how to best serve beans and peanut butter while the jars were passed around.

It was just beginning to get really dark when dinner was made and by then Kiddie Village was full of hungry campers. Now

they wanted pasta. Their timing was excellent and everyone camped there ate a wonderful meal at a reasonable hour.

After many helpings everyone sat around very full. The circle had grown rather large, probably thirty people or so, fifty counting children, who were less visible as they took up less space and sort of filled in the gaps between their parents. It was actually way too cute. Seeing everyone fed and happy was a wonderful feeling, good vibes and smiles all around the circle.

Some of the grown-ups had headlamps on and one handed his son a guitar. The boy was about twelve and his father encouraged him to play what he had been learning for the crowd. Everyone sat quietly, a few of the moms chatted with each other but still paying attention.

The fire although somewhat small was absolutely raging. The stones had become incredibly hot and radiated heat to the entire circle. All the people there were totally warm and had to occasionally scoot back a bit just to keep from being burned. It worked well because it made enough space for everyone who was now sitting back about two and a half feet from the fire.

Someone came up in a semi-panicked state, hours after kid village had eaten and asked if they had any food. The pot had been emptied.

The young man explained that they had trouble over at the main kitchen and realized they hadn't thought about this camp; but food had finally been prepared over there.

Someone told him 'no, they were fine' and had eaten hours ago.

The young guy said "Oh, ok" pretending to be relieved but not so secretly wondering how it was they had eaten already while they struggled so fiercely. Maddy told his story of his interactions with them earlier and they laughed at the jerks in the main kitchen after the messenger had left.

One by one other instruments were brought out and it was very cold as well as dark away from the fire. More people joined in and eventually the adults began taking turns leading the song circle.

Stars filled the sky overhead being far outside the city. The air was crisp and clean as the children one by one eventually drifted to sleep some in their parents arms or in their laps, or leaning against them. Occasionally the adults would disappear to put their child to bed.

As you could imagine over the decades their group outings had occurred, a body of practical knowledge on community building as well as natural living had amassed. People brought it with them to their communities, usually clumping in small groups. These communities and the cities where the people were based thrived. Eventually it made people curious; the smart ones anyway as well as jealous. Although these folks wanted to use it for their own personal gain it didn't work like that. After taking over these systems they quickly fell apart and the power brokers could never understand why. Just like rainbow.

The next day Maddy returned to say hello and some folks had decided to enbiggen the fire pit thinking that would make it better but the fire no longer breathed and now smoke was everywhere and it burned slow and cold.

Analemma

They drove with Miera further on the road until they reached the fair proper and were directed around a large, mown hay field towards parking.

It was late Friday afternoon and it wouldn't be long before the fair closed down for the night.

Maddy used some of the money Caitlyn made selling pot and bought a small bag of mushrooms from some dude in the parking lot.

"It's happening."

"It sure is a."

Maddy was watching the way the sunlight played in her hair.

"Do you feel that yet?" She asked him.

"Yeaeaeah..." he said vibrating in the seat and they parked out near a field where Miera bounced out.

Basking in the sun Maddy remarked "this place is like Kansas" surveying the bucolic setting. A woman cantered up to them and broke into a trot as she rode past with silver hair in the sunlight riding atop a speckled Apaloosa. With freckles to match and a smile divine she rode the field fair, green streamers of felt behind.

As they wandered through the figure eight people in colorful costumes, a large caterpillar, faeries and hairy drummer men passed them in ad hoc and planned parades.

They passed café's and stages decorated with padded pillows and eastern music. On another stage a man with an accordion grabbed an audience member and played the keyboard using their head; incense burned everywhere from unseen places. There was a dragon, a circus and on main stage was JGB.

Puppets two stories tall were walking with each other heads conversing, hand in hand. Kids pulling on their mothers skirts crawling over each other. Caitlyn kept walking eventually came to the end of the fair. She had never made it this far before and was honestly scared if she got too close to the edge she might fall off. She asked a security guard what lie beyond.

"Staff camp."

As darkness slowly set upon the snakes tail a motley band merrily led a few loose stragglers from the rear towards the front gate. Facing a pink and orange sun a last call for bus riders was made.

Maddy was playing mbira in the band when the song ended with the the verse "You're in for a big surprise." Maddy looked up at shimmering trees and watched bugs and faeries dance in the shadows.

The last bus drove off and he couldn't believe they made it 'that was easier than I thought' he said to himself.

They walked up to group of kids on the grass levitating each other using only their index fingers and asked if we wanted to join as they played in the cool green, blue glade.

"Sure!"

One of the kids was raised and Caitlyn went next.

"This is fun."

"What do you guys do here?"

"Huh?"

"You know, how do you have passes?"

"We don't" Caitlyn said somberly, she thought they had made it. The girl asking had passes for her passes.

She went on to describe a set of security protocols that sounded more complicated than the Pentagon's. She told them her plan "We all cluster together and rush the gate. You can have my art supply closet pass and this one from set-up." For some reason this girl liked them and was going to sneak them in. Fucking wild.

Maddy instinctively knew if he worried that security would pick up on it so he let himself relax and get into the game.

"Do you know the password?" Katrina asked Maddy, he shook his head.

"Password."

"It's always password" said Caitlyn shaking her head.

They rushed the gates and were let in. Inside a girl wearing a top hat and tights was tap dancing on a board playing accordion and singing paper moon.

They hung out with their new friends and passed a banquet table filled with cheese and wine and ate some of Maddy's mushrooms in a redwood gazebo as darkness set upon them.

"You've got to see performers camp." This daughter of the fair had all access passes to the fair which were usually restricted to areas based on need.

Her friends reminded her it was almost midnight. "The show is starting. Come on!"

Break dancers, jugglers and giant puppets fought it out on stage as the drugs began to take hold. They walked toward main stage and Maddy caught a glimpse of a man in lawn chair drinking a glowing green potion and Maddy was stopped by security while standing linked arm in arm between Caitlyn and Kate.

"Who's your friend here? Does he have passes?"

Katrina gave the man a pleading look "He's with me, he forgot..." something blah blah, "he's high" and the man switched gears before anyone could notice pointing his flashlight towards Maddy's feet. "He's not wearing socks after

midnight?" pointing out Maddy's sandaled feet. "Make sure it doesn't happen again." Katrina nodded in the affirmative.

They watched the show and after wandering around for a while Katrina led Cat and them back to a camp within the fair called the Tiger Wood and showed them to a new tent with a super comfy air mattress inside; perfect place to land.

Maddy mentioned he could play guitar and they passed it to him and when he sung the line "a little peculiar" everyone laughed a little. Maddy heard the stirring sounds of morning and left the tent to find Katrina. She took him out for coffee while Caitlyn slept and told him "we have to see the bubble man."

In a dewy field wearing a large hat a man was making huge bubbles with a wand.

Katrina bought him coffee from one the fair's only 24 hour stands. These people clearly had things worked out.

Passing a plain wooden gate he'd seen earlier in the day it was now open to reveal two outstretched carved and painted arms open and welcoming. He would never have noticed this before.

Chapter 7

Gardenville

Caitlyn was on the phone with Kobb telling him about their new acquisition and asked him what they should name it. Standing outside the fair they saw Meira and she waved and walked up to them "Hey, how are you guys doing?"

"Fuckin'g rad, you?" Maddy responded.

"I'm good. Hey, do you guys think I could get a ride with you?"

"Sure where are you headed?" Maddy asked her.

"I'm trying to get to California but a ride to town would be cool so I can hitch out of here. I need to get some food."

"No doubt" Caitlyn said getting off the phone. "We're going south, come on."

Flood The System

Like a warm orange in the sun Caitlyn was listening to the engine hum as Here & Now drifted down the Five, south to California. The rains had let up, the sun was shining finally and the days just got nicer.

The forest loomed cheerfully dark bright green overhead. The Redwoods emitted the sweetest smell and combined with piney, sticky dank as it burned. It smelled like heaven and the warmth of the sun felt like an embrace.

A chirp on the radio Maddy reached with his left arm to pick up the mic and squeezed the trigger twice. It let out a moan and mysterious codes rang out over the speaker, the meanings of which he could only guess at.

"Shoe fly pie, bye bye bye." Another voice came in "Check'in the mail." The dial read six. "Just got down."

They passed through K-Falls and Maddy turned on the stereo and Althos paced out along with the freeway; wicked slick jam.

Miera was on the phone. "How much further to Gardenville?" she asked.

"About three hours I think." Maddy took a long drag off a roach and handed it to her.

"Could you take me to Arcata? I have some friends there I'm going to stay with."

"For sure, the fruit patrol is coming up soon. Let's ash that and get the air cleared out..."

They rolled through a college town and Miera directed them to a park. Caitlyn parked the van and got a little sketch when she saw two cops at the entrance although they were not stopping anyone.

"Don't worry, come on!" Miera told them without looking back. They passed the smiling officers and found thousands of people in the grass shoulder to shoulder. They walked through the crowd and found a spot to sit down. A smiling gentleman in the group next to them took out a mason jar and insisted they try the contents. He was Proud.

After smoking untold bowls and joints people began to clear out and they let Miera know they were leaving when she told them she wasn't going any further.

"Are you sure you don't need a ride?" Maddy asked.

"No way bro, I got nothing but love for you but no way."

They decided to stop by the plaza before leaving to get some coffee and the van pattered out of gas about six blocks from the coffee shop and Caitlyn eased it to the shoulder.

Maddy overheard some delivery men talking about how they don't go through Gardenville anymore "since the landslide."

Maddy realized they were talking at cross purposes.

Pulling some cardboard out of a nearby dumpster and a marker from her pocket Caitlyn made an illustrated sign which read 'Need Fuel For Spaceship' with a little spaceman waving from inside a UFO.

Maddy fell back and watched Cait walk up to a service station. The minute she sat down a woman walked up handing her a neatly folded twenty dollar bill. She filled up the gas jug and returned to put it in the van and prep the carb.

In the parking lot a man wearing a fishing hat and short khaki pants sat on a red Italian motorbike waiting to pull out into the street and Maddy stared long and hard at him. He thought he looked familiar in some way. "Couldn't be could it?" he said to himself.

Back out on the highway they drove as far as Ukiah and parked near a pizza place running into some kids from the gathering.

"Hey fools! What's crackalackin'? Where are you guys staying for the night?"

"Van world" Maddy answered. Caitlyn was fussing with her bag.

"All van all the time" he responded. "Come park it at the biodiesel station with us, it will be safer for you there."

They had a trailer at the biodiesel station and immediately invited the kids to spend the night. They ran security for the place.

His partner continued where he left off "We have to find somebody first but the pizza place sometimes gives out leftover slices at closing" which was soon. They walked down a little dirt trail to a stream where a whole mess of crusty backpacking kids were drinking and fighting.

"Oi, has anybody seen Ojo?"

"No fuck off!"

"Fuck'n, come on" their bud said to them and they walked up to the pizza place where the employees fixed up a whole large pizzas worth of miscellaneous slices for them.

Caitlyn mentioned it was her birthday. She was kind of bummed no one knew but also didn't want to say anything; mostly she was scared no one would care.

"Oh fuck?" The guy responded putting his arm around her. "Let's have a us a celebration then!" She lit up, it was exactly the response she could have wanted.

They stopped at the mini-mart and his girlfriend pulled a few crumpled bills out of her pocket and combined them with his counted them and went around the mart picking up things while the other three hung out for a minute outside.

Dude's girlfriend returned with a smile on her face, chocolate cupcakes and two bottles of malt liquor under her arm.

Climbing into the van they drove the few blocks to the station and the young woman directing Caitlyn to a parking spot next to their camper.

Inside the camper they were joined by the kids parents and after eating stuck a perfect little birthday candle into one of

the cupcakes and sung for Cait. Combining and sharing what was left of their stashes they smoked and afterward the parents left the cramped space.

Guy asked Cait if she could put the three remaining slices in their tiny fridge only because she was closest and there was no way to move around inside the tiny space. It was slated for someone's breakfast. Inside the fridge was a dried amanita mushroom in a plastic bag, some plastic containers with casserole and celery stalks.

My Sister, My Spouse

Gardenville, a quiet hamlet nestled in the mountains is notorious for its current incarnation as a sort of pirate colony of hippie-expats and the industry they spawned. The town was founded by prospectors and loggers and due to its remote location it still retained the same flavor.

They passed a vacant utility building off the highway which had a spaceship and Bigfoot painted on the side of it and rolled into a parking spot on main street; walking up to a coffee shop named Jahva. Caitlyn immediately started searching for snipes and started to roll one together as a pickup truck pulled up. A guy wearing a Righteous Roots sweatshirt stepped out and large hemp stalks fell out of the car along with some random nugs that were probably stuck to his clothes.

"Hey man, could you possibly spare any ganja please?" Caitlyn asked almost sarcastically. They smoked the last of their stash in Ukiah with those kind kidz.

"I don't do pot!" he said in an angry tone and scurried inside.

Maddy crawled over to the pavement and picked up some of the nugs that had fallen, sat on the curb and rolled a joint with some of the tobacco Cat had gathered a minute earlier.

Cat got into a conversation with a mom, son and eventually their father who stepped out of the bar next door and were smoking cigarettes.

"So that's an interesting name, how did you get it? Caitlyn explained something about kittens and how someone in town had actually given her that name, an old flame." The son pulled out a container, smiling and handed Caitlyn a piece of hash about the size of a golf ball. They had seen them hunting and gathering in the parking lot minutes earlier although hadn't mentioned it.

The air smelled of stale cigarettes and the California sea breeze; a sign across the street said 'Paradise'.

Some dude came rollin' up on his motorcycle and chose a place beside her as they now sat on the patio stoned and mellow.

"Cosmic!" Caitlyn was full of joy and gave him a big hug. The white bearded wizard smiled and after getting coffee started telling her this story: "Back then the only strains available were sativa from Mexico or Columbia that people saved from their bags but the first indica strains to come to California was about forty years ago. Then the only place you could find indica was in the east. So I flew to Afghanistan and spent a few weeks in the markets until I came in contact with a guy who could get me something, right? I sewed some seeds into the seams of my jacket and brought them back here."

While they talked Maddy just kind of listened and smoked a cigarette before wandering off and up a flight off steps.

In a glass case at a guitar store was one of Jerry's guitars. Actually it was one of Jerrys' kids. A modified blue number, god damn with the modifications if it wasn't sure to smoke.

The Weather Changed

His short almost curly, black hair was receding in the front & thinning a little on the crown. He had a short jilted style of mumbling speech and was explaining to his buddy how word of mouth promotional buzz was part of the whole ambiance of a blockbuster. He wore a loose, handsome olive green jacket with the sleeves partially rolled and cuffed before the elbow; it looked like Caitlyns.

They both stood in front of her, sort of like dogs defending their pack.

"Do you have a place to stay here in town?" Cosmic asked her while Mad was still upstairs.

"Nah, we were just going to crash in our van."

"That's not a very good idea. The locals have been getting upset about trimmigrants lately. If you want you can stay at my place and maybe I can find a little bit of work for you."

"Thanks Cosmic, you're the best" Caitlyn responded as Maddy came back down.

Across the street a nice woman was sharing rice and ground beef with her dog out of the same dish.

He continued, "I'm playing tonight at Tabby's. If you want a ride you can leave your van here for the night and I'll meet you there around eleven."

Zygon

Walking down into the cemetery off Bear Creek Maddy brushed the fallen leaves off of a stone marker, cleaning it to reveal the words "Here Lies An Exquisite Corpse" and Caitlyn recited the words aloud:

YHWH & Baal
A Bull and A Bear

Two Pillars
A Circle
The Square

Exhibeo Mappa

Caitlyn handed Maddy the cigarette she was smoking. "I wish I could write something so plain."

"Let's get out of here" he said taking a drag off the rollie and everything came into sharp relief.

They continued walking and found a small hole in the fence. Crawling through it they were led below the cemetery to a beautiful waterfall where thirty different kinds of mushrooms grew. They were everywhere, but you had to know how to look.

The rusted shell of a shot up old car from the 1930's lie among the brambles and Maddy imagined prohibition gangsters and shootouts as his heckles raised.

He picked some oyster mushrooms off a stump. Caitlyn had a friend somewhere in town and led them back up another trail onto Bear Mountain road for dinner.

They roasted the mushrooms under dandelion leaves and Bree had fermented a big jug of organic apple cider using wine yeast. "Yum!" she said with the sweetest continence and introduced them to her dog friends.

One of the women who lived at the house was a redhead from Kentucky who invited them over dinner to the radio station KMUD for Psychic-Vibe-O-Sphere show she hosted every Wednesday.

"Is the 'D' silent too?" Maddy asked in all sincerity.

"No don't be ridiculous" Caitlyn said with food in her mouth.

They walked to the station and sang along to the chorus of a song the redhead was playing as sort of a theme "joy to the world".

Later walking back Caitlyn told them about her plans to meet Cosmic later and the redhead spoke up. She seemed to have taken an interest in Maddy and invited him to stay with her for the night.

Parting ways Maddy found himself back at the house while Caitlyn found herself outside the café smoking a spliff while listening to Cosmic's fiddle just inside.

Examining the weird square stem of a salvia plant on the back porch of the single story ranch home, tastefully appointed with period built-ins and stacked with records, Jos made some tea.

Outside Cosmic put his fiddle away and they climbed onto the back of his bike.

Holding on tightly to him they rode up Alterpoint road where automatic gunfire rang out at the sound of his motorcycle engine.

"Don't worry, they always do that."

On the floor of Jos' baby blue room sat Maddy listening to records late into the night and when it was time to sleep she showed him to a room which was painted in matching pink, but not before he saw Bree wondering around the house naked in a daze. Maddy didn't think twice, hippies are always getting naked. He smiled thinking of the words his friend once said; "Naked, what's wrong with that?"

CC pulled up to a small shed which opened to reveal stacks and stacks of books as well as several motorcycles. They parked the one they were riding and Cosmic started telling her

the hike up to the house was too much for most people, explaining the beauty of packboards.

"It was deer trail..." and he stopped along the way to reach under the root of a tree and felt around pulling out a tin. "People just give me this stuff. I don't even want all of it but I assume you might want some."

There was LSD, peyote pills; he grabbed a small bag of weed and returned the tin. When they reached the top it wasn't a house so much as a tree fort. It had two levels and was plain plywood shack and nailed pinewood floor put together with two by fours. Inside was a small bed, a radio, various stones and books and bits of leather and many, many packets of instant dissolvable vitamin C.

As he moved a box of ocarinas so she could sit he explained to her "I feel there needs to be a balance in the world. I saw a lot of violence in Vietnam." He shrugged and looked down. "So for every gun that I buy, I purchase an equal amount of musical instruments. That way things have a chance either way. I'm not contributing to the evil in the world."

There were a lot of ocarinas and Cat wondered what else was stashed in the hills. "You can stay in the geodesic dome next door. There are a lot of rats at night so don't let them bother you and don't wander off the property. The line is that little creek, just a few hundred feet from here."

The next morning on the way back into town they stopped at a service station and he bought her a turkey sandwich "my treat". It was a delicious made to order deal. More of a country store. He wore an olive green field jacket, just like Caitlyns.

They passed a fork and Cat asked him where it led "Dark Canyon, Murder Mountain road. They say the old sheriff was hung down there." He dropped her off in town and she waited by a nacho business and called Maddy to meet her.

"So what's the deal with Cosmic?"

"My ex's parents saved him once. I guess some guys were giving him trouble, they tried to drown him in the Mateel. Hey- I called my friends dad. He said he has a little bit of work for us if we want."

"Awesome. I haven't eaten since last night and I'm fuckin' broke as a joke son. Do you have any grub stubs left?"

"Yeah, a few bucks I think. We can stop by the grocers and pick up some avocados and shit before we go to Erenagh's."

On their way across the street they ran into one of the twins, apparently Cait had known dude for some time on a casual neighborly basis.

He was telling Cait about his new daughter, something new since she last saw him and showed her his new guitar. "It was really expensive, it cost five thousand dollars." It was inlaid with moonstone and gorgeous. Tallboy walked by with a group of kids, she lived in Mendo and was up for a few days.

"Hey, oh my god it's so nice to see you!"

"Hey Maddy! I'm busy right now but we should totally hang out later!"

Caitlyn asked if she could play the fancy guitar and he agreed. She started playing in Em and Gadd9 a peculiar strum and made up a song on the spot.

*I dove into a bottle just to see if I could fit
I thought, I dreamt I nearly saw, the end to all of it*

*Dancing pets, minuets, spinning girls with rhyme
Yes I did see all these things but none of it was mine*

Well I went back to the garden just to see who was still there

I saw everyone I'd ever met who'd ever lost their heads

and they sung oh, oh oh uh oh!

Someone walked by and tossed her a silver dollar. Marching up to the store a sign outside said service dogs only.

They walked into the grocery store and inside the clerks were all wearing heavy eye-liner and moving slowly while a super gothy version of 'Putting On The Ritz' was playing over the intercom as what appeared to be loggers did their shopping.

"This place is weird" Maddy said with no apparent sense of irony.

"Yeah, I think they're high on drugs" said Cat with a completely straight face when the music was interrupted with a call "Produce check on 24-66."

Someone else responded over the intercom "Repeat last call."

"Produce check on 24-66."

Maddy looked sidelong out of his eyes thinking they were talking about them but didn't say anything.

When they got to the counter an older woman with pink permed hair and horn rimmed glasses rung them up and they walked into the brilliant sunlight with nothing to blind them to it.

"Hey! You want to check out the thrift store before we head up the mountain?"

"Sure, when are we supposed to go?"

"I don't know I have to call him" Cat said pulling out her phone and after a brief exchange it was agreed he would see them when they got there.

Inside the thrift store Caitlyn picked out a super cute tie-die dress and a few cassette tapes, Onyx and some Indian bangra stuff and a nos black hat with the words 'retired' stitched into it.

"I feel like I'm in a funny, weird movie."

"Get them into yours before they get you into theirs" Caitlyn said with the grace of black cat and hopped into the van and started her right up. Despite the fact it looked like a rusty piece of shit Caitlyn was a fucking mad mechanic.

The Money System

They drove the winding road to Island Mountain where the sculptor lived at the very top which Caitlyn could recognize by it's mailbox.

On the forty acre rolling property they were greeted by a dead Honda motorbike and not much else except for the gorgeous rolling view of hills covered in oaks and madrones. There was a two story home the man had built himself along with a converted studio garage which had been rented out to a former Art-wood graduate which he'd turned into some kind of micro-theater with attached kitchen. Next to that lie a half beaten trailer one of the kids had gotten for free as salvage after the semi-tractor it was riding on hit a low hanging overpass.

A tallish guy with a pony tail came out to greet them and directed them inside the trailer. Inside a massive trim operation was underway and the movie Countryman played on their small TV. The resident and his friend a Trini offered them a seat and asked if they would like to smoke. Putting a small

wicker tray on his lap filled with miscellaneous bits and buds he rolled a long joint of outdoor onto the tip of a Benson and Hedges 100 and they smoked about three joints in that way before he lit the cigarette. "Funky" he said. Indeed.

At the bottom of the property a woman who was studying to be an EMT had her own small garden in a beautiful little home not bigger than a chicken shack. It was draped and decked out in all manner of handmade tapestries. A gentle wind blew in through a sliding glass door and out the other end in the kitchen space where they sat at a small table and Maddy sipped a beer with the cool California sun streaming in every which way.

After meeting everyone and saying their hello's they went back up to the main house where Dan Erenagh was digging a spring box a few hundred yards from the house. "You guys here to work or what?"

"Uh, yeah. Yes Sir." Maddy told him.

"Ok well then do it." For such a cool looking old dude he sounded dead serious.

On a redwood deck overlooking foggy valleys and manzanita they picked pairs of Fiskars out of an old yogurt container and began. Surrounded by stone work and sculpture a medical license rested, framed on table near a few sticks of neglected incense.

The bottom floor of the house had an open floor plan with wrap around glass windows and a sunroom where a bunny played behind cacti. There were three bottles of tequila on top of the fridge along with Chantrel and vodka.

Caitlyn showed Maddy how to make scissor and finger hash by rubbing the resin off every so often when they became too sticky to work. The scissors quickly became coated in brown tar and it rolled easily enough into balls which they smoked a bit of with some of the popcorn buds, the tiny little fluffy ones that weren't really saleable. That was one of the best parts of the job, they got to keep all the hash that collected on their

fingers and a fair amount of scruffy bud. After a hit or two they had to set it down, it was way to strong to smoke more than a little bit of but it was GOOD.

Talking about Humboldt strains and genetics was like comparing different varieties of grapes and terra, a connoisseur could easily notice and appreciate the differences. The chemy schwagy shit in the cities couldn't even be called pot compared to this. It would be like comparing box wine to a fine Beaujolais Appellation. Their appreciation alone was enough to unite them against the 'savages' of the outside world; but of course it was also so much more than that.

Caitlyn's ex was off somewhere in the hills, housesitting for a family friend and wouldn't be around much this summer. They were talking with Dan who was also trimming.

"Why do it?" Maddy asked, knowing he sounded stupid but feeling brave and safe.

"It's a version of the money dream even hippies can buy into" Erenagh said. "Like any American community after the war when the farm bill went upside down and they started paying large corporations to dump milk it put the family farm, the foundation of America out of business and a lot of them did only thing they could do; turned to a cash crop."

These are the relics of America, ancient old America. The die hards, the hardest stragglers and strugglers.

The Federal Government hadn't gotten into drugs at all before the war. They were increasing its powers steadily and people knew it meant a loss of freedom.

"America's true national pastime, the money game" Caitlyn said without looking up. She was quickly turning buds over in her hand.

They sat on the back porch as the sun set over the hills and Erenagh wanted to show them some of the music he had been working on and brought out a guitar.

He was telling them about one of the massacres that occurred which allowed the settlers to take the land they were now occupying. Being part native Mad felt kind of weird about the whole thing but whatever. His family had never been conquered and he was proud of the fact. Apaches can be like that.

After resisting being put on a reservation they never received identification numbers from the government and eventually integrated into society more or less. His great grandfather Victorio had become a stone mason and literally founded Fort Worth. Outlaws through and through, the lot of them.

Erenagh began to sing in a mournful way "Dark canyon, dark canyon look what the settlers did. The settlers hid while the natives fled as they burned Dark Canyon down."

A copy of Tigerlilly rest on table. The sun had set and it was rather late. Maddy was still sitting at the table when Cat told him to come upstairs. She had something she wanted to show him.

"They're from the Long Island area originally."

On the wall a framed degree from Columbia University hung. Next to that was a framed pair of work gloves that were completely torn up and in brass the words "Easy Money".

She showed him to their room upstairs which had an amazing space mattress and was covered in the most gorgeous hand made quilt Maddy or Cait had ever seen.

Caitlyn began to take off her clothes and Maddy followed suit slipping into shorts. They climbed into bed which rested next to a window which gave the illusion of being in the clouds. High above the world looking out into the treetops the moon rose as they tried to be discrete in the small house.

Back To The Land

The next morning early before the sun rose Erenagh came to them "I need to harvest some plants, will you help?"

"Totally" Caitlyn said with sleep still in her eyes, Maddy curled up next to her like a kitten.

"Come on, hurry."

She noticed the impudence in his voice and rousing Maddy she quickly put on wellingtons and a rain-jacket over her sweatpants and raced downstairs following Erenagh straight into the garden, out the back door.

Erenagh handed both of them a few large, black garbage bags and began madly clipping branches with huge shears and trunks with a hacksaw stuffing the branches into the bags. They quickly brought them into the house and proceeded to spend the rest of the day madly hanging someone else's pot.

Trimming furiously with a joint being passed around every few hours and a constant stream of music, Maddy's hands were cramping. Caitlyn could go almost twice as fast as him. "Pick out the crows feet but don't take too much off. Buyers like big buds."

A friend of the family was sharecropping some of his land and he hadn't been able to get a hold of them the last few days but the fog was setting in and the buds were about to go moldy and the entire crop would be worthless in a matter of hours.

With their help they were able to salvage about a pound or two out of what would have been probably four or five. Suffice to say Erenagh was not happy about it. It was partially his money out there rotting.

Sitting in the bedroom next to the new Maple computer listening to Communism Now and drinking coffee just kind of bored but content Cat's ex came over and Maddy went

downstairs to the back deck to smoke a cigarette understanding he didn't need to be present.

Wolf Pack Children

"He thinks in the future all wars will be fought over water. Here" she said pulling something out of her bag. "It's pure MDMA, I got it from friends. This is hard to get you know." Maddy licked his finger and had a taste "I'm ok. I don't mind a pinch of good coke though."

"I think I can get some, hold on a second" and produced a small bag from her purse and Maddy smiled.

"Damn" he said and started rolling a blunt sprinkling a pinch inside and licking his fingers.

"Hoowah! Let's go outside and smoke this."

They grabbed Erenagh who was dicking around with the rabbit someone had left in their care for the week and asked if he would care join them outside.

Under one of the oaks as mistletoe hung above them they spent a little time on the mountain smoking the blunt as the twilight shyly played on the hills. It felt like they were sitting on top of the world. Erenagh wasn't familiar with tobacco wrapped ganja and only had a few hits leaving them to the rest of it. He said he usually only smoked to help his sex drive when his girlfriend was over.

They returned inside as it got dark and cold, and Maddy was reading a first printing of Wail he found on the bookshelf while they were trying to figure out dinner.

There wasn't much food in the house and the market down the street was a shakedown. Erenagh had a bunch of bulk bulgur

and other hippie things and asked Maddy to go grab some veggies.

"The neighbors won't mind, I know them it's ok. They're done harvesting."

"Are you sure?"

Maddy wasn't quit as stupid as he seemed and knew this was absolutely about the worst idea possible. But Erenagh insisted it was fine and Maddy didn't want to offend him.

Walking across the yard and over the field to the neighbors place which was marked with a simple fence, an old wood shed and some new white, long row greenhouses in between which was a relatively small garden plot that looked all but exhausted. Maddy called around to announce himself as he approached, insisting he was sent by the next door neighbor and that he was a friend. No one answered. It was eerily, if not peacefully silent as the sun began to set casting a copper golden glow on everything.

Padding around and not seeing any viable veggies except a few wilted zucchini (and everyone knows friends don't give friends zucchini) he thought maybe there might be something in the gigantic greenhouse. Maybe that's what the old man was talking about?

He peeked gingerly inside and saw roughly three hundred feet of mature marijuana plants on both sides, wall to wall. "Are you fucking kidding?"

He walked back with some of the wilted zucchini feeling like a total rube watching his head as he left, grateful to be alive.

Safely back at their home for the evening Erenagh prepared a stir fry while Maddy and Cat sat in the living room watching a movie on a small TV when some the neighbors came over to invite the guests to a party that evening. Word gets around quickly in such small towns, when they want it to.

"Would you like to stay for dinner?"

"Nah, thanks Dan. My wife is making dinner back at home so we should get going."

"It's from your garden" he said with a smirk on his face barely looking up from the stir fry. The old prankster had a tiny beef with the way the newcomers were such dicks about everything, compared to how cool they were when they moved there in the sixties. I guess in a way he felt responsible.

The young man's expression drastically changed and he whisper yelled something into the old man's ear Maddy couldn't hear.

"He's fine, it's about time he learned. Whats the problem? Your plants are fine aren't they?"

"That's not the point!"

Maddy felt uncomfortable and Caitlyn left the room to attend to some unseen business. The matter was quickly settled and after grabbing a quick bite (adding Sriracha) they climbed into young man's small pickup and headed down Alterpoint road further into the hills.

Always Here, Sometimes There

At a mountaintop home which was small but very beautifully appointed, hand painted Spanish tiles wrapped around the kitchen. Maddy sat on a luxurious couch and asked if they had any rolling papers.

Outside wild wheat waved in the wind being blown by an unseen spirit, depositing her children in the grass.

Caitlyn was in another room grateful to be amongst other women for a change.

The young man asked Maddy "So what's your story?" and Mad started telling him about their time in Canada when the man interrupted.

"Oh yeah? I know them." The wife of the glass blower friend they met in Canada had gone to high school in Ontario with the same dude who owned the field.

Maddy's was at an obvious loss for words as his widened eyes searched the floor trying to make sense of it all.

The man just smiled and shrugged. "We're everywhere. Hold on a second, let me see about those papers" and he disappeared up the stairs into the loft.

There was a knock on the door and one of the women ran out of the backroom to greet another guest. There were hugs and greetings.

The woman turned to Maddy who was still sitting on the couch, breathing deeply. "Thanks for helping me with the harvest. If you hadn't stepped up I probably would have lost the whole crop. Mold was setting in quick."

"Yeah I know, that's why we helped."

"Here is my way of saying thanks" she handed him brown paper bag. He looked inside and it was filled with recently cured bud.

He smiled demurely "thanks" just as the young man returned moments later with a package of the biggest cigars anyone had ever seen.

"Uh. Fuck" Maddy muttered as his host handed him the cigars.

"They're new" he said. He looked hurt.

"No I mean, wow. These are great. They're huge." Maddy certainly wasn't trying to hurt his feelings, he was merely shocked. There was about an ounce of bud in the small paper bag and what was going to be a couple joints from his personal stash quickly turned into something else entirely.

He handed them to Maddy and he put the paper bag on the table and started to strip a cigar. A bag of mushrooms was passed around and the adults dipped their hands in as if it were a bag of candy. It was kept out of sight of the children, their mother and a few of her friends declined and stayed behind having other more appropriate plans for the evening.

"Are you ready to leave?"

"In just a minute." Maddy struggled to keep up. He put the entire bag of pot, probably about an ounce of good bud into the thing.

The girl had met Caitlyns ex-boyfriends sister at a school in Colorado where the poet taught.

Maddy finished rolling just as everyone came out and the young man announced "Ok let's go!"

Live and Direct

They pulled up in the import pickup truck and oozed out of the cab. Outside it was dark. A band of skeletons playing jug music danced in sync around a campfire while inside the barn just ahead was a dance with live bluegrass where horses mingled with the crowd.

"That is why they're so particular with who comes out here. It can be really dangerous. You are dealing with all manner of things that could easily hurt or kill people who are trained and

sober. It takes a special person to be able to handle these things while high" Caitlyn mentioned before disappearing inside.

Maddy was tired and wanted only to sit near the fire outside and chill where there was a small circle of like minds. He lit up the gigantic blunt and smoked about half of it before one of the campfire kidz asked "is that.. is that what I think it is? May I..?"

Maddy smiled with a look that said "Are you kidding? I just smoked a half ounce of bud in your face and your asking if... never mind", as he avoided rolling his eyes. Maddy passed it to him. He took a few puffs before handing it back. No one else wanted any.

"And these are the heavys?" Maddy thought. "No wonder this place is coming apart."

Their neighbor the young man rolled up. "Hey are you about ready? We're leaving soon."

Maddy nodded and when he stood to get up he remembered, felt the mushrooms. The ground seemed squishier and bouncier than usual. It had probably been some time but who the hell could tell.

"Yeah, thanks." He made his way to the pickup where harvest girl wasn't doing so well on the mushrooms. She looked sea sick.

They struggled to help her into the truck. She seemed to forget how to get in "Head first? Feet first?" It was all very confusing and their host tried his best to negotiate the scene with mildness, calmness and the least amount of physical interference.

"Is anyone else ok to drive? I don't think she's ok."

Maddy looked up as if he was a dog trying to understand his person. Oh god, the lizard trip. Maddy shook his head, he was seeing the lizards. "Me? Yes! I am fine! I will drive."

"No, no thanks. That's ok I got it."

"Are you sure?" Maddy asked.

"Yeah."

He must have noticed or seen something Maddy hadn't. he knew better than to argue. This man seemed sober and confident. "Ok" he said with faith. Any other time Maddy would be more concerned about the driver, but he had the utmost confidence. He knew whatever thoughts he put into the situation would manifest more readily so he relaxed. Besides, this guy has it.

He sat shotgun as the truck climbed up and out of the dirt road and dropped the two of them off at Erenagh's.

"Boomer's, Timber Trails, Redwood Empire"

The next day downstairs after breakfast with the harvest done they were sitting around with not much to do.

"There's something happening in San Francisco tomorrow."

Maddy got the feeling Erenagh was trying to get rid of them, and this was a great way to do it.

"... and some friends of mine are having a party in a few weeks. You should drop by."

"Won't we need to...?" Mads began to ask. Cait just laid back inspecting her hair for split ends.

"Just say you're a friend of mine. You can't beat the party system." Dan said seemingly saying their lines for them writing something down on a piece of paper.

"Then let's join it" replied Maddy.

"Hey! We can go after the movie premier" Caitlyn said eyes wide turning to Maddy as if she was trying to convince him.

Still early, the fog line was below the house on the hill. The manzanita and oak seemed to float in the clouds like a dream, it was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. He now knew why it was called the island. It seemed to be completely apart from the rest of the world below. The sun was like a giant fried egg on the fog line. Maddy giggled and said aloud "fried". Caitlyn said nothing as if she knew exactly what he meant driving a little further.

Forrests of Fyvie

Parked in town, counting their money and bud trying to figure out how much further it would get them Caitlyn ran into the same guy she was smoking out at the BBQ. She figured they were a little short and this would be the last good opportunity to make some skril for a while. Harvest season was coming to a close and it was hard to get a day job without a work history; that you could admit to.

On paper she had no experience, done nothing, was nobody. Real life was another matter. To consider the straight world fake and this real was a trip but rung true.

"You seem familiar."

"I've known you your all your life." He said with an easy smile. Hippies are trippy she thought. We've all known each other in a past life yes? A psychic tribe.

Caitlyn felt almost bad and wanted to make up for it.

He started telling her about the blue school bus he used to drive, the one that was painted wildy on one side and used as background in a skate movie. He told her it used to belong to a punk band from LA, which was named after a sex act. She remembered she'd met Haybale years ago working recycling crew at a festi. At least she thought it was him. She wasn't sure so she didn't say anything, it had been ten years and thought maybe he looked different? If it was him he had given her a tin stuffed with pot at the festi and showed her how to make bubble hash.

She felt really good she had a chance to smoke him out at the BBQ as payback for the tin but said nothing.

She asked him if she could visit his place. They needed more cash to get to the show in the Bay. He had two other guys with him. She remembered her ex's advice 'never accept a ride in a truck with two guys' but she knew them, Haybale anyways. Besides including him there were three.

"Well my old friend here wants to go up to my place huh?"

"I mean, yeah. That would be rad."

"Yeah. We have somtin' for you, don't worry about that. Let's go" he said with the smile of a car salesman and a simple twist of the head. Hippies 'r so weird you could never tell when one was acting strangely or not.

Work aside Cat was really just happy to spend some time with old friends and Maddy was along for the ride.

Haybale really wanted to drive their van. It was actually an antique, the last model year before Federal emissions regulations went into effect for one ton trucks (as the shortbus was officially classified) and it was a beautiful beast. She didn't mind obliging his request.

They had to stop to fill up some gas jugs and get beer and chicken before they left and for some reason this was a problem. Caitlyn insisted it wasn't and helped negotiate the terms. Haybale's two friends would take their car and get the gas, her Maddy and Haybale would stop by the grocery store.

Caitlyn ran in with a handful of cash and Maddy changed into a bohemian skirt and was wearing a loose tie die blousy thing. It actually looked really cute when he was put together. Caitlyn loathed waiting for him to get ready but was turned on immensely by it so she tolerated it. It was kind of a weird relationship but they were really happy and satisfied in a way that was rare.

While they were waiting in the car one of Maddy's friends from Portland ran up from the parking lot and called to him excitedly. "What's up bro?!" His lady had just left him, taking their son. He wasn't doing the super best. Maddy knew he wanted a ride to a cool scene, anywhere.

"What are you guys up to?"

"Going up to dude's house here. Love to help you but you know how it is" Maddy said with a kind smile and a shrug, like, I don't know what to tell you. Haybale was super annoyed and obviously didn't want anymore people up there but tried not to show it.

"There's always next summer bro. Have a little faith. Lovin' you."

Caitlyn returned with a six pack featuring a picture of a shark along with some chicken quarters for the grill.

Haybale drove very slowly back up Alterpoint. They agreed to stop and wait at the top of the hill for his buddies who arrived just as Caitlyn was packing a bowl. She felt a little nervous and took the battery out of her clock to 'stop time'. The device still sat in the glove box, nearly forgotten.

They passed a utility building for the electric company and someone had stenciled a mouse with dreadlocks next to sloppy, large orange letters which read 'god is a crazy woman'.

Maddy spoke plainly, reading the sign. "Oh, I think I met her at the café. She loves animals."

No one seemed to think this was strange in the least and said nothing as they they approached Murder Mountain road with Haybale driving. They passed a dready hippie looking dude carrying an AK-47 across his back.

They continued down winding dirt roads that got increasingly narrow until essentially coming to the end of it where it just petered out into brambles and mud and nothingness.

Haybale tried to bring the van up a dusty trail where the greenhouses were. It was struggling on the dust. He was burning up the transmission and Caitlyn pleaded with him to leave it below when the fuel line ran dry and it was backed down onto the main trail.

They were greeted briefly by a dog and a young woman at the top of the hill who quickly returned to the bush. There was another man there who was quite annoyed at the guests but Haybale insisted they were friends. It was Haybales show and he didn't feel like taking orders.

Leaning against an old caravan was a hand painted wooden sign by R. Crumb, of Mr. Natural; an original. The guys had kind of stolen it. They said every year someone would take it and clean it up and return it to main road. They had just simply forgotten to return it.

As darkness set upon them the boys put the chicken on the grill and broke out beers and began talking. Maddy had brought out the guitar he took from the University, it was actually a three hundred dollar guitar. Solid-top rosewood. Haybale insisted Maddy play something and he proceeded with the song Caitlyn taught him earlier on the sidewalk. The

guys kept talking and Haybale insisted "Be quite, listen. The artist is playing for you."

Sitting in lawn chairs around the makeshift camp Haybale began to tell them "There are no problems, only solutions. This neighbor of mine see, he was running his generator at night and it was keeping us up so I asked him to do something about it. He didn't so I did. I set his cabin on fire. No problems, only solutions" laughing. He had flakey nail polish on one of his hands. "That's a nice van you have, those things run forever if you take care of 'em."

The other guys were quiet and it was disarming as they sat semi-circle in their lawn chairs around the grill in the warm California evening.

Viviendo El Sueño

It wasn't long after dinner they were smoking and Maddy pulled out some tobacco. "No tobacco on the mountain" Haybale insisted. Maddy put it away, scolded.

His associates brought out several small familiar looking vials placing a few on the table and began to give themselves a few drops each, handing Maddy one of the vials to dose himself.

He took about four, an extra one from three because the liquid was coming out kind of bubbly and thick. Caitlyn did the same and disappeared into the van setting up the bed in the back folding down the futon and putting out a very large bottle of water within reach for the two of them. The van was eighteen feet long and had a small shower pan in the back with an instant propane hot water heater resting inside a five gallon bucket. Very comfortable. Her hands played with the blue shag carpet on the ceiling as her pupils dilated. She was glad she was below the hill instead of near the caravan as she relished the relative privacy and solitude of the van.

Maddy was still on the hill talking with the guys who wanted to show him a trail when he quickly realized about eight minutes

later this was going to be one fucked up trip. One of the guys asked "don't you want your guitar?"

"I'll get it in the morning." Maddy said, trying to keep his legs under him.

Haybales business partner was telling Maddy about how kids would come out to trim and after demanding to be paid would simply be lined up and shot.

They were kids that wouldn't be missed and no one ventured down that road, near the brambles.

He wasn't sure if they were bragging or mourning and they didn't make it clear who did such things or if it was in fact true. Perhaps they were merely trying to give him a scare. These ol' boys could be like that, however they could even more easily turn. Maddy felt sure if he played along there wouldn't be any trouble, they were probably trying to feel him out. Shit occasionally did happen.

It occurred to him using slight of hand they easily could have given him something different than they had taken themselves but he wasn't too worried about it.

"Thanks for the dose. Love makes the world go round" he said smiling naively like a child.

"Yeah, three bucks a hit" one of the guys said laughing taking a sip of beer.

Maddy's smile dropped.

Haybale brought out a painting he had bought at the BBQ which was sold as charity and asked Maddy if he wanted to hang out in his caravan for a bit and talk or whatever but Maddy shook his head no.

"How many hits do you think that was, about, man?" Maddy said like an old drunk.

"Eight-Eighty thousand. I don't know exactly" and smiled. The guys behind him laughed "Yeah, he's going to have cancer later" one of them told another.

Maddy started thinking about how humans were a genetic hybrid between monkeys and pigs the aliens engineered for their own personal amusement and somehow knew The President was in on this cosmic joke. They all were. At this point things like this were really not beginning to phase him at all any more and he just decided all he really wanted was a warm bed and maybe a nap.

"Sorry, really, thank you for everything but I need to lay down" and handed Haybale the beer in which roughly three quarters still remained. Much time could not have passed. Haybale just smiled.

Standing outside the van, the door was open.

"It's beautiful out here. Stars are falling." It was gorgeous, the Perseid meteor shower was peaking. Maddy was staring at the sky. "It's nice in here too" she told him and he climbed in after her. He was glad as he clambered into the van and the bed, just as gravity seemed to begin to malfunction.

Outside he couldn't tell if he imagined or really heard the guys talking. "We don't have to kill him. We can just give him eight thousands hits of pure crystal and ruin his life, turn 'im into a crazy homeless person."

The words seemed to be spoken in vain, Maddy wasn't concerned. As they laughed outside he assumed they were having a good time and felt was happy for them. It's nice having friends he thought to himself. Meanwhile Caitlyn was passed the fuck out more or less next to him. He pressed up against her playfully just to cuddle or whatever and all she said was "You're not even hard."

He was a little annoyed. Is that all she ever thought about? He would have shook his head if it didn't make the planet swing so wildly.

They were shining a red laser pointer into the van and Maddy thought, that's kind of a stupid trip effect.

Fearless

As day broke Maddy was eager to rise and get the trip over with, it wasn't particularly pleasant. He felt a strange air about but felt this was something he must do. He slowly strapped on his boots like every morning before, controlling his breathing and thinking he felt rather scared and assumed it was the acid. He had a new flag in the van and decided this was the reason he had it. It must be brought to the top of the hill, sort of reverse capture the flag. Of course! It was a game.

He was in an otherwise bright mood and glad it was morning almost, the sun was slow behind. Opening the van door to the fresh mountain air it felt like Christmas. He shouted "Good morning! Let's see what Santa brought us!" and wandered up the hill. The flag was just under his jacket, hidden; a surprise?

Haybale's business partner greeted him just at the top with a sub-compact forty caliber pistol pointed right at his forehead. Maddy's mood immediately changed, maybe this is why he felt odd?

"What are you doing? I should kill you!" His pupils were dilated but he was not joking. This was nothing like the black and white army footage Maddy saw in high school.

"I uh... thought I could help?"

"Go down the hill. Now!"

Maddy had no choice and silently prayed he would not be shot in the back of the head on the way down.

"Oh, shit." What had happened? Weren't we having fun? He knew the guy wasn't crazy about having guests but didn't realize he was a target for murder. That seemed a little extreme, not that it was his any of choice at this point.

Maddy had just realized it wasn't a laser pointer they had on him but the laser sight attached to the gun.

Ravens watched from nearby.

He climbed in the van and froze between the two front seats awaiting what ever was to happen next.

Up on the hill the man had pulled out a chainsaw and began brandishing it around, felling trees in the path of where the van was parked.

The sun at this point had greeted the day and the man came down the hill towards the van, Maddy looked up.

"What were you doing up there?"

"I thought just" Maddy couldn't have sounded more timid, his life depended on every word and breath that came out of his mouth.

"What the fuck did you say? You here to steal our weed?"

"No...?" Maddy said in negative confession.

Haybale came down and interrupted them. "What's going on here?"

They walked back up the hill and Haybale put a coffee pot on the grill and the man began having words with him while Maddy sat back in the van awaiting his sentence.

Caitlyn was still in her clothes from last night and sitting on the futon petrified with fear. "What's happening?" she whispered. Maddy just shook his head and barely visibly shrugged.

Haybale was calm.

"You said no more people. You broke our agreement!"

"Dude, he's family."

"Well I'm telling my mom!"

"I don't give a shit. You tell your mom, because I know my mom has got my back!"

They could hear them arguing at the top of the hill and couldn't believe what they were hearing.

"I'm taking all my plants!"

"Go ahead."

They felt their life was in Haybale's hands and hoped whatever goodwill they had built up over the years was going to be enough, now that time had come.

"Let's go ask Maynard."

The disappeared for a minute and it was freezing outside because the sun had not yet heated the day but they were too scared to shiver.

The young man returned and fired a few rounds into the side of the van. It seemed he might even be trying to hit the gas tank, which happened to be a custom plate-steel welded fifty-gallon job. The bullets went straight through the paneling but didn't make it past the fiber glass shower pan.

He hopped in and tried to start it. "What the fuck. I should just push this piece of shit into the ditch, with you."

"Please, we'll leave. We'll never come back."

Haybale was short behind him. "It's a new engine Jeff, it's fine, it just needs a little gas" he said pouring coffee casually as he wiped the sleep out of his eyes, barefoot in the dirt surrounded by pot plants. Haybale was wearing a shirt that said Daddy's Little Angel. It was pink and obviously way too small.

"Is that all it needs? Just a little squirt of fucking gas?"

"Yeah see, right in the carb."

Jeff hiked up the hill and grabbed a can sloshing gas all over Maddy as he shoved it to him.

"Here. You have five seconds."

The dog house was off and Maddy splashed it in and started it up. Revved the engine and peeled back.

There were a couple of hand prints on the window.

What he thought was another shot exploded glass right between his seat but was in fact the spare battery between the seats crushing a small fluorescent light fixture that rested on the ground.

Taking hairpin turns as fast as he could on the loose sandy dirt he nearly lost control on one curve as he counted his good luck instead of concentrating. The road had been cut out of the hillside and was steep on one side, sheer on the other.

Maddy was grateful he was driving this old American beast. Any other vehicle and they would be dead. The man surely would have lost patience by then and Haybale would have been left dealing with bodies. Likely as calmly as he was when dealing with his business partner earlier. A small import sedan or anything else of the like and the man's shots surely would have pierced the tank or burned the clutch earlier on the hill painting the kids into a corner Jeff would have imaginably enjoyed finding himself in.

Suddenly a small black pickup pulled in front of the massive American van blocking it just as they reached a cross roads. Maddy could have easily pushed it off the mountain but he knew they would find him and besides, it was impolite.

It occurred to him they were merely letting them get off the property so a murder would be harder to tie to them. He also remembered they had been seen together at the grocery store by Maddy's friend.

The man who appeared to be a Mexican national got out of the pick up and approached the van "What happened?"

"Which way too town? Donde es town?" is all Maddy replied. Caitlyn was still in the van terrified.

"That way" the man pointed.

"Thank you, adios" and with the engine still running they peeled out.

The redwoods loomed as the sun rose behind the hills and it still looked absolutely gorgeous. Maddy took a good long look as it may be the last time he ever saw that Northern California sun rise.

"I can't say I never saw anything like it" he said pulling the van over on the shoulder after a few miles. They were still quite a ways from town. He remembered he still had the flag under his jacket. He jumped out of the van and dropped it by the

side of the road at the top of the mountain, more or less; also perhaps as a clear sign of distress.

He got back in the van and she handed him a vial. "Here, do something with this" and reached into the pouch on the doghouse to remove the clock and put the battery back in, restarting time.

Maddy pulled over at the gas station to check the map and the clerk asked him all too cheerfully "So. You passin' through here?"

"Eh, Yeah" he said with a forced smile.

Caitlyn had to straighten the van out before they hit the highway and assess the damage. Just enough to make sure it could make it out of town. The van reeked of burnt dex and the dog house was still off the engine, wires and shit everywhere.

Some old Mexican covered in tattoo's walked up to her. "Looks like you had a pretty rough night huh? You look like you just escaped from a mental ward" he said having a laugh.

"We were just leaving" said Cat as Maddy walked up, still wearing the skirt, still wearing the tie dye blouse, hair sticking out in every direction.

They nursed the battered van out and onto the highway going south, the guitar was still on the mountain.

Chapter 8

The Public's New Sense

Peace and Love (OR Drugs and Trashy Sex)

Sitting at a gas station on a small indian reservation Maddy was playing a video slot, eating a corn dog while Caitlyn was performing a field drain of the transmission. Replacing the old fluid, and trying to be cool, the pan was partially removed and tilting down. Putting it back up she made sure it was properly torqued. The felt gasket should hold up ok she figured. Rubber would have already melted together and been destroyed.

Inside Maddy overheard some guys talking about the machines. "They're not all the same you know. Nah, I used to program some them. They reward certain behavior to keep you playing."

Maddy put in a dollar and played for a while doubling his money. A sign on it read 'For entertainment purposes only'. He exited the gas station as Caitlyn was putting away a small set of wrenches and he got in the van handing her the two bucks, sucking on a lollipop.

"What's this for?"

"Whatever."

The Farm

On their way to the bay they picked up a couple of riders hoping it would bring them luck, dropping them off in the middle of nowhere a few miles later.

"Shit happens" one of the riders said.

The car seemed too heavy.

Exhausted they rolled into the bay and she picked up her phone and called some kids they met at the Litmus Tests earlier.

"Hey, it's Cat. I met you at the show in Portland remember? Yeah, hey we're going to be in the bay this weekend, do you think we could kick it over at your place for a couple days? We're staying in our van, yeah. Rad see you soon. Thanks!"

She handed Maddy the phone and he directed Cait to an address from the map.

Outside the nondescript white building there were two or three school buses and the inside of the warehouse had been converted into living spaces. The bassist for Shit Brains was doing a sound check.

The main space was covered by a large Persian carpet and they were surrounded by stacks. There was a couch in the corner and above it a pegboard stuffed with plastic flowers. A small anteroom with an electric organ was covered with a bunch of gross orange and green shag carpet samples and a recording studio. It was tiny but had a couple nice boards and mics.

The kitchen was large and contained two refrigerators, one specifically redesigned to hold beer with a keg tap drilled into the front of it that didn't work or never held beer anyway, a regular electric range and a coffee tin full of bacon grease.

The bathroom was hand painted really cool blues and greens and across from that, a monster factory.

They were getting a mini-tour.

Two of the guys made all these crazy realistic foam props for movies and shit. The room was filled with foam creatures. Jars of chemicals littered the floor and a workbench in the corner was festooned with completed masks and dental tools.

Dakota turned around and scared Cat with a very large crescent wrench. Steel grey with all the right stippling, shadows and accents it looked perfectly real, was about three feet long and he bashed her right over the head with it. It didn't hurt a bit. Pure foam fluff.

"It's actually a really rare art. There's not many people in the world who can do this." He showed her these printed manuals full of mixing instructions by some guy.

A computer 'café' also housed a small bookshelf which contained several mycological books; stuffed between the pages of which were baggies of spore samples.

Now on the other side of the building holding beers they were standing in a long narrow hallway two stories high. Made out of repatriated pine shipping pallets were a bunch of cubby-rooms where everyone slept. A floating rope bridge connected the rooms on the second story. None of it was to code.

Adjacent the rooms was an equipment storage area which held all manner of roller skates, bicycle helmets, hockey sticks and a large pot of frothing liquid.

"Raisins, prunes, oatmeal all boiled up and set up to ferment with bread yeast." Echo explained. "I used to be a chemist in college" she said with a forlorn expression, before I lost it, all.

Caitlyn followed Maddy upstairs to the guest room.

The walls were covered with eight and a half by eleven, neon photocopied show posters. Parliament Funkadelic, White Stripes, De La Soul. The walls were painted bright yellow and had a psychedelic purple ribbon painted across. The ceiling was slatted and depending on the angle had various designs on it and two beds, one of them bunk. There was a nightstand between them. Maddy opened the drawer and inside was a large plastic oven bag containing about a pound of psychedelic mushrooms; roughly two partially deflated soccer balls worth. Dry. "C'est la vie" Caitlyn said with a shrug.

Echo had followed behind them "I think my friend left those, she stayed here the other night."

"Oh?"

"Yeah, she's teaches elementary school. You can have them if you want. I suppose she bought a bunch and didn't realize what she was getting into."

"Sick" Maddy said stuffing them into his backpack.

"Hey what are your plans this weekend? There are a bunch of shows lined up here, you should stay!"

"Nah, I think we're cool; thanks though."

"Alright, well Japanther is playing tonight with VCR, you're going to stay for that right?"

"Oh, totally."

"Cool" she started nodding as Dakota walked up from downstairs.

"Hey, Red and I are going up to the catbird seat in a minute if you want to come."

"Awesome, I'll see you up there in a few minutes" Echo responded.

"Do you guys wanna poke some smot?" she asked turning the kidz.

"I don't do pot!" Maddy said sternly and broke out laughing along with Caitlyn. Echo thought it was funny but didn't know why and went downstairs.

Downstairs Mikaela was milling about and got super excited when she saw the kidz.

"Hey you guys! I'm getting married tomorrow!"

"Oh my god. That's great! To whom?" Caitlyn asked.

"He's a really sweet guy. I went to high school with him. I'm meeting up with his family tomorrow."

"Hey we are about to smoke, do you want to come?"

"Nah I'm good thanks. I'm leaving in a little bit too meet up with my friends, have fun though" she said waving them goodbye.

SI DEUS SI DEA

Far above the rooms at the end of the strange hallway was a ladder rising above an indoor wooden porch. Irregularly spaced boards were nailed onto the rafters which were about eighteen inches apart forming a catwalk about forty feet high in the air.

Suspended about two feet from the roof where a piece of it long ago had been replaced with clearish plastic, hung an old van bench seat.

"FUUCKKK" Maddy thought as they made their way up and it came his turn to cross like the two before. He didn't want to seem like a wuss so he did it and actually it wasn't that bad. He just concentrated on putting one hand in front of the other as he crawled across, just like they did. A fall from the top onto the concrete below could easily kill you.

They all climbed in and plopping down Echo spoke "Dakota climbed as high as he could with a rope and tied it."

Squished together cozily, Dakota took out a pipe and handed it to Echo, which she packed. Handing it to Dakota he sparked it before passing it back to her.

The seat was set back at a comfortable thirty degree recline and showed a lovely view of the stars through the skylight. It was a cool spot.

Echo's face was just a little off and she asked Maddy if he wanted to see something cool. "Um." The pretty 20 year old pulled out her teeth and grinned like a gumless old woman.

"Jeezus."

"I was struck by a TrEx train in Portland last summer during a run. I had to have re-constructive surgery on my face. See?"

They would race down the hills every Saturday on skateboards and minibikes. They hadn't been around town very long but their high visibility lent the mayor to constructing a statue in their honor made of hundreds of kids bikes chained together. It was near to the giant onion.

Just a few feet down was a crawl space filled with pillows, tulle and old mattress forming some kind of 'makeout' den.

Maddy got good and fucking stoned and when it came time to walk back across after Caitlyn he could have shit himself.

Downstairs Mikaela was making out with the dude from Shit Brains and Caitlyn was playing with the spin cycle. A tricycle the clown made. It had coasters for the back two wheels. Maddy helped with lunch. Endless amounts of Blue Brau and quinoa topped with fried tofu, kale, and mushrooms in a curry soy sauce and garnished with generous amounts of Sriracha.

Maddy found a box of overripe mango and asked one of the girls "What's up with these?"

"Echo found them dumpstering a few days ago, you can have some if you want."

"I'm kind of in the mood for desert. Would you guys mind if I, made a pie?"

"Go for it. No one else is going to do anything with them. Then after a pause "You know Dakota is real upset. He thought you were a woman." Maddy looked very androgynous. Somehow the information had been relayed to him.

Maddy was kind of curious about boys and Dakota had been making moves. Cat blushed looking away trying not to smile and quickly changed the subject. "Hey what's the deal with that sign outside?"

"We take turns, you can paint whatever you want on it. The paints are in that storage room you saw earlier."

She covered the sign board with white and printing in black bold letters wrote "VOTE HERE".

Maddy made a mango pie which tasted a lot like peach and Caitlyn later passed out behind the stacks with Maddy joining her. "I don't ever want to leave you" she told him burying her face in his hair spooning with him, he nodded and they fell asleep together.

She woke up later about halfway through Japanther's sound check that afternoon taking a sharp breath. "Oh shit, I forgot! We're late. Come on we gotta go" she said grabbing Maddy's collar and dragging him behind the warehouse to their short bus.

Entertain Them With Hope

About an hour later they were in Palo Alto and made their way through various roads to the parking lot at Shoreline where

The Dancing Mummies were playing and came across a dude holding one finger in the air and some kind of sign.

She pulled over and dug around in her wallet pulling out three tickets she'd bought months earlier, handing one to the dude. He insisted, "can I trade you some ganja for it? It's really good stuff."

"We're good dude but thanks" Caitlyn told him with her cool smile.

"Are you sure? Here try a little" he said and unscrewing a small tin handed Cait a small handful. "I was gonna get a ticket but it costs sixteen dollars now." Their's was actually much better and they didn't know what to do with it.

"Thanks dude!" she said climbing back in.

"You should slap a stealie on the back of that ride!"

Caitlyn found a parking spot for the van and opened the roof vent and drew the curtains. Wandering past stalls of vendors a woman was selling an unofficial Mummies song book. Wearing a loose white dress she had a starry look in her eyes like she had lost something and wandered into her school bus.

Inside the gates a couple of cops were patrolling the area when Maddy saw a familiar face "Raven!" and wandered over towards her while Cat had begun to mingle. They had met years ago canvassing for a wilderness conservation group.

He chatted with his pal for a minute and someone packed a bowl of stickysweet. Her friends were bitching about the cops which kept them from toking openly. Maddy had a flash of inspiration and pulled a sage bundle from his backpack.

"Where the fuck did you get that?" Raven asked.

"Does it matter?" he said playfully and an old man walked by with a bunch of tie-dye underwear, socks and bandanna's for sale winking at her he saying "See how that works?"

Mad lit it and started walking around the lot, the bundle being inflamed by the breeze. This upset the cops and they started following after him. Noticing this immediately everyone in the lot started tokin all at once taking it as a signal and the cops basically gave up, choosing instead to chase after the sage. It didn't seem like they were trying that hard.

Somewhere in the wildly colored sea of people, a wildly colored bus was waiting in the parking lot with a handsome smiling man outside it in a top hat. It said 'Weird Load' on the back and was hand painted with all kinds of cool scenes.

Inside were piles of blotter and TopHat was talking with a group of smiling seniors "Have you ever seen the like?" when Caitlyn walked up to him "Hey have you ever thought about having a Litmus Test GED? You know for people who missed it the first time around?"

"That's actually pretty funny, I hadn't thought of that" said the grinning man and Cait asked about the blotter.

"These are ART" Mr. Tophat said putting emphasis on the word 'art'. Smiling he turned around to continue talking to someone else, ignoring her.

The band was starting and Maddy met up with Cait waving to each other from across the makeshift street.

Caitlyn slipped the vial into her bra whereupon reaching the gate a brief search ensued.

Inside the show Caitlyn more or less hovered and occasionally pulled out a knit mushroom from under her shirt that contained a lighter minutes earlier.

They started mingling with the crowd and people put their heads back as she dropped a few into their mouths. Some got a little, some a lot and some none.

"Where you at?" She asked one guy looking him straight serious and his eyes snapped open.

"See how that works?" she said with a wink looking at Maddy. He didn't think she had overheard the man earlier. "Out of the crack and into the mesh" he said.

Maddy started screaming 'fire' in hopes the band would play his request and they did too.

After the show there was a guy just outside the gate selling mushie chocolates. They were already high as fuck and certainly didn't need any more drugs, per se.

"They're a great value" the man said inferring they had been discounted because the show was over.

"What the hell" Caitlyn said pulling three bucks out of her pocket "I like chocolate."

Meeting up with some kids one of them asked if he could get a ride to LA.

"Sorry dude, we're going the wrong direction."

They drove out, down the highway and pulled into one of the first truck stops they could find. Parking their short bus between two semi-tractors a sign across the gravel lot illuminated it with fluorescent light and they smoked a bowl together in bed before falling asleep.

The next morning Maddy was awakened to furtive movements under the covers by Caitlyn and he turned around to face away from her and joined in. They shared the chocolate in silence while the fog on the windows slowly cleared and lit

another small fire. Less than an hour later they were bouncing out along the open road and were in San Francisco in no time.

"I just think they should have names for all the animals because they're so pretty."

"Penguins are people."

Meanwhile back at the art warehouse place one of the guys was pissed. People kept stopping by to ask what the voting sign was all about until he changed it.

Walking the Dog

Coming up on Golden Gate park they came across a crew of crusty kids sitting at the entrance. The kids were drunk as fuck, fighting with each other and anyone who happened past them they didn't like at the moment.

"What you looking for?" One of them stopped punching their friend for a moment to ask Caitlyn.

"Your mom." It was easy but it was all that was needed.

"Me too" said the dude turning down.

His friend didn't think it was cool and the scumfuck started to get up but fell backwards. The others growled for a half second before they resumed fighting with each other and drinking. He had 'SFSF' tattooed on his knuckles.

"I should skullfuck you for saying that you fucking hippie!"

Caitlyn kept walking, slightly amused by it and left before he could remember how walking works.

Up near the Janis tree on hippie hill some old veteran beckoned to them. "Hey Gypsy Gal! Come sit with us!" the tramp shouted. Caitlyn was wearing the tie dye dress Maddy had on earlier and he was wearing her coveralls. They kept beckoning for her company and smiling "How are you enjoying the Vineyard?"

"Hey you beast."

This guy who was in a wheelchair had just mixed a pint of cheap vodka into a soda cup and was passing it around. The kids shared some of the weed they made trimming and passed the cup.

Maddy paused when he saw a butterfly land nearby before flying on.

He had an overweight disheveled man with him wearing a dirty white t-shirt that didn't cover the lower portion of his torso. He was eating a cheeseburger from the chain across the street.

"Hey, you can call me Ari. It's been a while." He shook her hand and held on to it which caused her to go into sort of a trance, trying to understand why he was still holding on. "Time sure flies doesn't it?" looking into her eyes.

"Hey you know how fruit flies fly?" said the cheeseburger man with a gross laugh as food fell out of his mouth. They sort of ignored him and he didn't seem to notice. Caitlyn again got even deeper into the hole and the guy started talking while she was phased out. "You guys look like you just escaped from a mental ward."

"Yeah, we've been told" said Maddy. Caitlyn just looked at him and had to laugh.

"Ever hear of CABO?"

"Mexico?"

"Nicaragua, Cheap Ass Black Ops. I was doing all kinds of shit, killing women and children; you know what? It's not in any records. When I got hurt they kicked me out and didn't give me shit" taking a long pull of the cup.

"We always had special exemptions. We were the little asterisk on every bill. It stood for us, the stars; the little stars. So are you guys rainbows?"

Maddy spoke up "I just went to my first regional."

"He doesn't realize we've been doing this for a long time" Caitlyn said.

"Doing what?" the man asked gruffly.

Caitlyn looked at Maddy and he just kinda shrugged.

"Don't act like you don't know, you're the ones who help us do it."

As Maddy sat there thinking about the government he started to feel a little homesick, for wherever that was now.

"See you don't know shit. It's not that cause of light bullshit. They're a military unit. It refers to their lack of standard uniforms. Stemmed from project Camelot, researching control of civilian populations for military purposes while retaining an indigenous identity."

"Is that true?" Caitlyn asked him.

"Probably" replied Maddy tilting the cup up to his lips, holding the straw to one side with his free hand.

"New order, old order same fucking thing. The only difference is civilians have become the primary targets. A nation of martyrs."

"So we're like, part of some ill-conceived CEA program? They planned this?" Said Cait.

"I thought it was existential self-actualization through psychedelic motivation" Ari's friend said confused.

"Fuck you."

"I think that's the basic idea."

"The CEA was looking at methods of control. Inadvertently one of the agents designed to control people, made people uncontrollable."

"That's funny" Cait said grinning taking her pull from the cup as it was passed around.

"Not really" Maddy replied looking more serious.

"I didn't mean like ha ha funny."

Cat spoke up, "Zen was in on that stuff."

"It wasn't planned and they weren't in control. Instead of inciting riots the dose had a paradoxical effect. So the CEA pulled the plug. When they couldn't stop it they changed it. After they started busting the Heads the Nazi scientists administrating the project took over the acid production putting out stuff laced with pyrrolo-indole alkaloids and neurokinin. Guaranteed to give a bad trip."

They warned people about acid while they were giving out laced stuff. They should have warned us about the indole alkaloids and neurokinin, the acid was fine.

"The strychnine" Cat said with a thousand yard stare.

"They flooded the market with cheap heroin brought into the country stuffed into the corpses of soldiers."

"Nice" said Maddy nodding a little bit.

Caitlyn gave him a death stare.

"What? It's a good idea."

Ari was getting more drunk and continued ranting. Caitlyn and Maddy both tried to be patient and lit a bowl to make him more interesting.

"It wasn't a complete bust though. They got real good at hypnotism. You can make someone commit a crime if their perception is altered in a way they think it's normal. A direct function of your altered view of the situation. They create exploitable personality traits by exploiting the survival instinct. The key is splitting someone's personality. A new belief system can be coded by stressing a person beyond their capacity for response. Most people will alter their beliefs rather than have a breakdown over the dissonance. Ted Kazinsky was an early experiment, so was Anaïs Nin."

"And if you get out of line" he said pushing his finger into her ribs "they can discredit a person or even use their triggers to make them self destruct" finishing the second pint and getting obviously schwilly.

"Fucking zombies man" sighed Maddy.

"How does it feel? To realize you're just a programmed project? Your peace and love is nothing but a bunch of bullshit?"

"My love isn't a bunch of bullshit. Speak for yourself" said Mads angrily, squeezing Caitlyns hand. She felt uncomfortable and shook loose.

"What a bunch of punks" Caitlyn said and for a moment after that and they all sort of just stared at each other.

"Say, how'd you like to make a deal? You two wanna buy some dose?" he said changing the subject after finishing the soda.

"Let me guess, DOC?" Caitlyn asked rolling her eyes.

He started laughing, "So you aren't as dumb as you look."

"We're good dude thanks" Caitlyn said looking away with a sarcastic tone and smile and after pausing a moment looked him in the eyes. "Alright; You wanna make a deal?"

He stopped laughing "What's that?"

"You give me the rest of whats in that cup, and I'll give you something in return."

"What?" He said gruffly his steely blue eyes looking into hers.

She smiled politely "That's for me to know and you to find out."

"You gonna kick me in the nuts or something?"

"No! Nothing like that. I promise you it's good. Pure as the driven snow."

He looked at his buddy, and his buddy shrugged.

"All right" he said with a cockeyed glance. She reached out her hand to take the empty cup and frowned telling him "Close your eyes, and open your mouth."

The men looked at each other and smiled. They knew what this meant and did as they were told. She pulled out the vial from beneath her shirt and proceeded to dose both of them.

"Hey, aren't we doing the governments work for them?" Maddy asked.

"We don't give bad trips" said Caitlyn with a cheshire grin.

"Let's go listen to the music, the show should be starting soon."

He just looked at them and sighed "Carry on".

Walking a few hundred yards off some bike cops rolled past pulling their sidearms and barking like animals as they dismounted in front of Ari and pal.

"Get on the ground! On the ground! Hands where I can see them!"

They arrested the fuck out of him and his buddy but not before tasering Ari. "We got reports of someone over here waving a gun around?"

Normally she would have intervened but she did nothing. It looked like they were going to kill him and a crowd formed around the scene, cell phones in air. The cops didn't seem to care, death by cop had become so commonplace.

While Ari was getting arrested and Caitlyn was watching wondering what to do, Maddy had wandered off like a puppy and was selling the mushrooms. When she looked up she saw him a few hundred yards off taking a hit off a giant balloon.

"Damnit Maddy." She stomped off to grab him.

One Epic Summer

The summer sun looked down at ten thousand people standing around for the concert. The San Francisco Mime Troupe was holding a protest in the park as theater and this one lone asshole in a goofy outfit was prancing around in the grass, wearing a cape as they walked towards where the music was happening.

Cat leaned over to Madds "He owns TicketJacker. He basically like, decides who makes it and who doesn't in music. We used to go riding in the hills, I had no idea who he was. I think he really liked that about me" she said laughing. "At his birthday party once he was so surprised to see me he squeezed my hand so hard I thought it was going to fall off" she said still laughing when another asshole in a goofy outfit came to challenge him.

The cop let him know theater wasn't going to be tolerated within San Francisco's parks.

"Is this part of the play?" Madds asked.

"Uh, yeah sure" shrugging with laughter, raising one eyebrow like I don't fucking know what they're up to, are you kidding. Why not? "Yeah, you know the original lease holder was murdered a year to the day he signed a new lease taking over the Majestic. I tried to teach him Spanish but only wanted to learn the curse words."

Caitlyn grabbed Mad's hand pulling him along. "Hey come meet Jim and Stacy."

A couple of Dippies were sitting together smoking out of a pipe that looked an awful lot like a menorah.

Cat introduced Maddy to Jumbalya Jim and his feminist wife Stacy who was working to start a donation based woman's health clinic. They were just over from the bay where they were diggin People's Park.

"Hey Caitlyn! It's great to see you. How are you doing?" said the woman clasping Cait's hands giving a gentle squeeze. She smelled faintly of patchuli. Smiling she introduced herself.

"We're pretty good. This is Maddy."

"Hi, nice to meet you. How did you guys get here? Do you drive?"

"Yeah, what's up?"

"Do you think we could get a ride?"

"Where you headed?"

"LA?" she said with a half smile.

"Totally. Word. Yeah, if it will help you out."

"Will it help you out?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, it would be a real big help if you gave us a ride."

"Ok."

"Hey Jim! She said we could get a ride." He waved at her from a ways away. He had wandered off and was talking to some hippie.

"So what are you guys up to right now?"

"We're going to go see the music." They exchanged numbers and Cat agreed to call them when they were getting ready to leave.

They came up to where one of the stages was and out of a two story fridge a band came out dressed as assorted fruit. Weird. Maddy couldn't be sure if he was tripping.

Shawn Mesger was playing on stage with the famous harmonica player. "Ah! It's Shawn Mesger Band. I love them." Tickets were already sold out, not that Cat would have bought any anyway.

"Fuck yeah let's do it" she didn't really care but was down as fuck for whatever. "Hey, let's see if we can get backstage. I bet you we can if we try."

"I ain't about to doubt it."

Cat casually walked along the edge of the barricade towards backstage finding her entrance near a promotional tent for rum and putting one leg over the other climbed over the fence, Maddy following suit. A security guard had been watching them and quickly appeared while Cat paid no mind giving a flirty wink to one of the caterer's. The security guard quickly told them they were going to need to leave when Cait said "It's ok. We're recycling crew."

Not having laminates that shit wouldn't have flown except the woman Cait was making eyes at a minute ago walked up behind the guard. "Yeah, it's ok. They're with us" she said in all seriousness and the guard just kind of shrugged and turned back to his station.

The caterer quickly went back to refilling the buffet table and Caitlyn handed Maddy a plastic cup filling hers from a keg with a heron on it.

Climbing on stage to sit behind the curtain with the beers, the sun set on the Pacific.

The Doctor of Funk was headed off to a waiting sedan that looked way too small for him and asked Cait for a hug after she introduced herself.

"Tap fam" he said bumping chests.

Suddenly Maddy felt a familiar sound from the PA. "Holy shit!"

A guitarist was walking through the crowd with a remote mic on his guitar. The crowd grooved and the drummer couldn't keep up. The guitar groaned ba grummm!

"Now shake it!" and the crowd stomped. He was really kind after the show, one of the nicest dudes there and took a bunch of time to talk to Cait.

"My family is Persian and when I learned to play guitar I taught myself. The key to that song is it's actually an ancient Persian rhythm." He said tapping it out on his leg. He talked to her about his ranch and exotic animals and the DIY spirit.

Play Us A Tune

Walking towards the Mission they came across a Collaborative Arts Insurgency thing and stayed for a while.

"Man chill. I'm word smithin' like Wesson it's the kinda guy that rhymes with horny and she's meltin' like margarine. You know I'm get harder than..."

It was getting late and the kids were kinda super tired but not really ya know and they walked into a small modern coffee shop where a small group was floating around like fireflies. The air was warm. They sat down and someone walked up to them. "Hey could we just get some hot coffee please? How much?" Cat asked.

"No cost."

"Huh?"

"We're closing."

"Oh..?"

"Like for good, this is just a little party." Music played through a dock from someone's phone. There was an old hippie dude having a good time mingling with kids who were teasing him playfully.

Caitlyn grinned and pulled the 'retired' hat out of her bag, never worn and walked up to the dude. "Here" she said with a chirp handing it to him.

"What's this?"

"A present."

Laughing the guy tried it on. "Thank you" and continued with the kids. No one asked.

The kids got their coffee and were chillin' when the dude got this brilliant idea. He asked Cat if she wanted to go on a cross country motorcycle trip with her. She actually thought about it for a second, it sounded kind of rad. "Nah dude." He looked very disappointed.

It was late and Caitlyn just remembered Jim and Stacy "Oh shit!"

"What?" Maddy asked with genuine concern.

"Aah. Stacy and her husband. I was supposed to call them before we left."

"Well, we haven't left yet."

"Yeah" she said picking her cell phone out of her pocket.

The soup fam was still somewhere near Haight just hanging out with "the nominee" and a bunch of black cats. Caitlyn just figured it would be easier to ask, or wouldn't have to, when they got there.

Psychic Driving

They loaded a pig, squealing, feet sprawled out as he tumbled into the van.

Jim and Stacy needed a ride to LA because they were hauling a pig to the Democratic National Convention to nominate it for public office. One of those things that, you know kind of makes sense at the time. It kept trying to stand up but his hooves could get no traction on the metal floor and it finally contented itself, albeit a little confused to lying on it's side. The van got traction however and was well on it's way.

"We needed a name to signify the radicalization of hippies and I came up with Dippie. It's a combination of hippie and defense. You know, like our war department. We were just in Washington a couple of weeks ago. Are you going to the Hailla Gala Ball in a few weeks at the Flying Pig Farm?"

"Huh?" Cait asked turning away from the road for a split second to look at Stacy.

"Yeah, that's who helped us find the pig. Rich is gonna be playing you know."

"Oh yeah" Maddy spoke up, "is that the thing Erenagh was telling us about?"

"You guys know Dan?" Stacy asked.

"I mean, whatever. He's my ex's dad" Caitlyn said eyes glued.

"Fuck man" Stacy said shaking her head staring at the road.

Caitlyn raised an eyebrow, shrugged and just drove.

"So what would you say the biggest difference between like now and then? When you guys were younger." Madds asked Jim, sitting in the back with the pig.

"Difference between then and now? The numbers, the sheer numbers."

Maddy had a genuinely difficult time imagining something larger than he just experienced but trusted Jim's word.

"Lot's of people are living lives in conflict with their beliefs. That's why SSRI's are so popular. They work by atrophying your judgment center, your soul. The human spirit has always been their biggest obstacle."

Caitlyn was listening in from the front seat. "My step dad used to feed me amphetamines every day first thing when I woke up. For about twelve years until I left home."

"You know something like eighty percent of all foster kids are medicated as soon as they get in the system just so they become manageable?" Children without parental attachments are perfect, often their parents were experiments. Most often unknowingly as it would ruin the experiment" Jim told them packing a bowl.

Although she couldn't understand at the time, as people got older they learned things and met people.

"Therapists will deliberately fuck with you just to get a response" said Maddy hitting the pipe.

The van rumbled past rows and rows of fruit trees. If you looked just right for a second they all appeared to line up before becoming a blur again.

Jim pulled out a small black leatherette pouch, unzipped it and took out a needle which already had some brown liquid loaded into it. Taking off his bandanna with his right hand and holding the needle in the left he tied off his arm and squeezed his fist until a vein popped out, shoving the needle in. Within seconds he slumped against the side of the van as dust streamed in through the windows and made the air look thick.

The lights flickered inside the van as it bounced along, loose wires. Caitlyn was getting exhausted and Maddy was already asleep. She pulled into a rest stop to have a safety meeting, of the sleeping variety. Caitlyn told him she wanted to try and he showed them both how to set up a rig.

She'd forgotten to plug in the 12v system and switched to the starter battery just long enough to get her gear together and quickly fell asleep with the front seat reclined. Maddy was in the back curled up next to the pig.

She woke up early to a text that Wake Up And Rage would be playing a free concert in LA the next morning and if she floored it she figured they might just be able to get there in time.

The battery was dead of course and although she managed to get a jump from a good samaritan but had to keep it at. As soon as she let off the rpms it would die again. The battery was way dead.

She devised a plan to keep the van above so many rpm's until it could pick up a charge on the road. Waiting until the lot was empty, shifting between neutral and drive she managed to make it to the onramp. Hitting the corner at forty miles an hour doing a police style turn at ninety degrees she popped the back tires off the pavement for a split second.

As they got about a hundred miles outside LA traffic slowed and a small sedan pulled out in front of them from a dead stop and the sleeper awoke. He must not have checked his six and five thousand pounds of steel was barreling towards his rear end at forty miles an hour, probably less than one hundred fifty feet away.

Caitlyn stomped it pulling hard right and the van began to go into a tail spin headed straight towards pilling of an overpass. Twisting the wheel sharp right into the skid she let off the gas, teasing it slightly and then pulling hard left she punched it steering with the throttle. She pulled out of the spin and sped past the other car in the shoulder.

"The fuck" Maddy said staring straight ahead but there was a problem with transmission. Pulling over she found the line was leaking. Cait tried her best to patch it but it wasn't holding pressure. It got stuck in third, than second and eventually first putting down I-5 at about fifteen miles per hour for at least 10 miles before it died completely. She knew it was fucked.

Chapter 9

Battle Of Los Angeles

They rolled in on the back of a tow truck to the outskirts of LA spending most of the money they made at the park and were dropped off at a gas station just inside the city limits.

Cat went inside to buy fried chicken and jojo's by the pound grabbing a handful of ranch packets while Maddy sat outside on the phone calling around to various tow yards trying to find one that would be willing to salvage Here & Now. With a burnt transmission it was utterly fucked.

Jim and Stacy thanked 'em for the ride and headed off with the pig on a leash.

They packed their shit back into their bags along with the device. With a deep breath and heavy hearts they made their way to the subway for a ride downtown, chewing a few stems along the way.

From walnut trees and almond groves they went underground into electric fluorescent lights and grimey concrete splattered with pages from 'alternative' weeklys covered in escort ads.

They got off downtown and started slowly walking, dazed. When they came up from the subway it looked like a fucking war zone. Cops in full riot gear. There were choppers overhead, trucks full of horses and armored vehicles. Even little plaques in the sidewalk stating "These sidewalks are private property. Your right to use them may be revoked at any time."

"Right?"

The bicycles the cops were riding loudly boasted the name of an arms manufacturer.

Eight riot cops standing on the running boards of an SUV all waved to them. Confused the two of them waved back, sweaty filthy and with huge backpacks.

The officers responded by flipping the two off in unison. "What the fuck?" Maddy said. This was going to be a very educational trip. Walking past marble banks gaurds stood everywhere and the free concert had been long over. It actually only lasted about fifteen minutes before a police riot broke out.

The Correctness

They walked past a café announced by a hand painted red and black sign above the door with a picture of two cats sitting back to back.

"Hey I need to use a bathroom. Come on I know this place."

Outside a tattooed brother with a goatee was playing a song with a couple chicas about the night. Maddy assumed neighborhood kids, sat and smoked a bowl of hash with them and listened to the medicine while Cait went inside.

"It means we are going to be back to back during the revolution" said the guitar player.

"What revolution? We must have already had one because there's no other way this place could exist" Maddy said nonplussed. The man smiled and kept playing.

A chalkboard menu announced the specials:

Vegan pork tartare

Noodle sandwich

The Bad Hippy, (peanut butter on a dog biscuit)

Lentils

Coffee 1, Cup extra

Inside a group of people were eating lunch. One of them was using a Sharpie to draw a hoof on the table as she worked on a bowl of carrot soup.

"Where's the bathroom?" Caitlyn asked a woman with an asymmetrical haircut and facial piercings who was wearing an apron scuttling about behind the counter preparing orders.

"It's in the back, but you can't use it. "

"Why not?! Don't you know who I am? I'm not a homeless person! I'm employed! I have a special dispensation from the pope to dispense LSD as sacrament. Outta my way!"

Maddy was thinking if her goal was to convince the crowd she wasn't an insane homeless person she wasn't doing a good job.

"Fuck. Whatever." The server turned around and continued her work.

She went into the bathroom to find a disconnected toilet in the middle of the room with a price tag on it "Classic" and managed to position herself over the sink.

When she came back out after spending some time on the free internet terminal she found Maddy holding an asp, wearing a flak jacket and a full face gas mask. He looked ridiculous. He had gone into a pawn shop the owner a bear of a man, roaring with every word and on his way out was propositioned.

Caitlyn came outside and just rolled her eyes "I hope you didn't spend too much of our money on that shit."

The mask was pointless and nearly impossible to see out of let alone breath in and he put it in his pack along with the flak jacket which was insanely heavy and bulky for the LA heat.

"Hey, it said on the internet there are supposed to be a bunch of protests downtown today, like, all over the city. I was thinking we could go check it out?"

The movie premier wasn't until tomorrow and they had some time to kill.

"Let's roll."

"Rock."

Quasi una fantasia

"How much of the mushrooms are left?"

"I traded them."

"All of them?", he shrugged. "Fucking goddamnit Maddy! I can't believe you didn't ask me or anything first!"

Maddy looked sheepishly at the ground and before he could say another word Caitlyn continued "I would have liked to have had a few more of those before you got rid of them all."

They came up to a park space where people holding signs were laying down, motionless on the ground. While they lie riot cops started taking position in the alley ways blocking every available exit, some holding rifles wrapped in colored tape. They went from a be-in to a die-in.

Maddy noticed as Cait laid down and grabbed her hand pulling her up pointing out the situation. "We gotta get out of here." She nodded and holding hands they jogged towards one of the last available alleys as a man took position, he smiled to them and let them past. Looking back they noticed tear gas being lobbed into the square as cops ran in and began arresting

people. It started getting late and they hadn't even thought about food.

"What do you think about getting a hotey for the night?" Maddy asked her.

"I think we have enough money. It sounds like a good idea, I'm tired."

They walked several miles through the city with their heavy packs and came to The Lucky Unicorn motel. Maddy showed ID and after filling out a short form they were given keys and walked up a flight of stairs to their room. Inside it was dark and Caitlyn hit the switch, Maddy setting down his back as the lights flickered on. He sat on the bed while she went to the bathroom and watched the news for a while in the shag carpeted, wood paneled room. Cat came out and called a pizza place before leaving to pick up a six pack. It would have been awful except it reminded Cat of the van and she kind of liked it.

Getting into bed with one beer left they turned out the lights, still wearing their clothes. Maddy turned to lay next to her but she scooted to the far side of the bed and he felt alone.

Che Quel Giudizio Finale è Già In Atto

The next morning they got some crack snacks and checking out made their way to the theater.

They didn't have tickets and stood outside with fingers in the air singing Mummies and Roaches songs loud enough for people to hear. The producer walked by and they could overhear him say "It's just like we pictured it."

The bus pulled up and the kids got on taking a seat near the front of the bus when TopHat got on and was very upset "That's my seat! Get off." Was he serious?

"I should kick you off, that's my seat. Get off my bus."

"Dag" Maddy said under his breath grabbing his pack but one of the kids looked at him like he was being too harsh. "I guess it's ok."

"Sorry," Maddy grabbed his pack and Caitlyn moved to the back.

They took spots on the back of the bus near a photographer for a ride around the block, getting off right back where they started from with Curious behind the wheel.

The queen was sitting next to them and Caitlyn asked her, "Do you think you could get us tickets? We need a miracle."

She smiled and said "Just keep at it."

A few minutes before the show started a guy walked up giving them two tickets.

"Fuck yeah." Caitlyn smiled at him and they went inside walking down the red carpet grabbing seats in the back stashing their bags with the counter.

The name of the movie was Unobstructed Awareness. It was a strange mix of scenes and the audience had a hard time following but everyone cheered as the characters were introduced.

Evenings Empire

Outside it was dark and they met a man wearing a handsome jacket wrapped in a lovely Pendleton scarf with a big beautiful smile on his face. He was holding a bag of groceries from the Whole Nut super market and stood next to them and rapped

for a minute. caitlyn was flying a sign with stars on it, almost out of habit.

"Have you ever heard of affirmations?"

"Yeah" Maddy said.

"They really work." He had short hair and a blond grey stubble beard. He said his name was Gordon and after feeling the kids out asked them what they were doing.

"Just hanging out what's up?"

"There's a party tonight, you should come by. Do you have a ride?"

"Nah man. We're hoofing it."

"Well, it's a ways from here. You can get a ride with me if you want. I'm headed out there in a little bit. I have to stop by my house first and change."

The kids looked at each other, it was kind of super risky and they had a quick huddle.

"That spells trouble if you ask me" Maddy told her.

"Fortunately you can't spell for shit" she responded while the guy was "om rama om'ing" a few feet away.

Pilling into a Mercedes with Caitlyn in Maddy's lap in the front seat the guy started talking to them the way someone will with riders. "Things arrange themselves based on probabilities which is why what we think effects everything enormously. The more we expect a certain outcome the more probable it becomes, until it is real. Do you guys know who the Roaches are?"

"Yeah?"

"They're supposed to be there."

"Really?" Maddy was kind of excited but felt it might be a cruel ruse.

"The Roaches always come."

Wish You Were Here

They drove and drove and drove until reaching Laurel Canyon and Gordon buzzed the intercom at the gate.

"Who is it?"

Caitlyn leaned over him and answered "Hello? Lost lovable orphans?!"

There was a click of the intercom going off and after a second a motor started grinding as the gates opened.

Inside people were standing around mingling with drinks, some in groups. Shenanigans were afoot. Someone was talking seriously "What if I had a raga drone intro into a blues song?" They stood there in the living room. A man walked up behind them and brushed Caitlyns uncovered shoulder and she began to feel sick.

"Within a time, the service men will come" she thought she heard him mumble and got spooked taking Maddy's hand and leading him into the kitchen where things were more chill, lighting a bowl.

"It was a different time, we didn't know it was wrong" someone said as they reached into the pantry for a bottle of

mixer before heading back into the main room not paying any mind to the kids.

"We're like their pets. They like us. They think we're, interesting" she said to him. She was a little upset, but wasn't sure why.

Maddy's heart was racing and he felt dizzy and weak. "I don't know if I can do this. I'm just so tired."

Caitlyn was sweating and felt cold, she wanted to be by the heater even though it was a perfect 72 degree's inside.

"Weird, this almost feels like an acid trip. Is the vial still safe?"

"Yeah" said Caitlyn reaching under her shirt. She took out the vial and put it in her bag. "I think we've been dosed."

"I don't think there's anything they could give us that would get us half as high as we try to get ourselves" Maddy said trying to laugh. "Here drink some milk. It will help draw out any toxins." He reached into the fridge but only found almond milk. Fucking shit.

There was some ginseng ginger soda in there and he pulled out two of those.

"What is your problem? You've had nothing but attitude since we got here yesterday" he asked her.

"Look I mean, I'm just tired. You go, have a good time."

"Suite yourself." He went to mingle with the crowd leaving her in the kitchen to stew.

Strange noises were coming from one of the bedrooms as he explored upstairs.

The bassist for the Roaches walked in grabbing one of the sodas from the fridge and introduced himself to her. "Hey I'm working on some new lyrics. I wonder if you could tell me what you think 'andkonwtherealshegosbleblopshejogo'". That's probably not what he said but Caitlyn was really high by this point.

"Raches' with an o. It means hunting dog in old English but we changed to spelling to make it cool you know."

"I'd work on it" she mumbled.

Some guy got into a confrontation with Maddy upstairs.

"You little fuck. Go on, get out of here. You're not welcome."

Maddy didn't know who he was or what he had said but didn't give a fuck for the bad vibes. He went downstairs to find Caitlyn to tell her he was leaving but she didn't want to go.

"I'm doing ok. Just go, I'll meet up with you later. Call me later, ok?" she reached into her pocket and pulled out a handful of bills. "Here, get a room."

Maddy felt like crying. He really didn't want to leave without her but didn't feel he had much choice and grabbed his bag. He really didn't want to sleep alone in a shitty motel and forgot she had all the drugs.

He left without a ride and started walking down the hill towards the city, lighting a cigarette trying not to be a cry baby.

The bus full of tricksters were off somewhere doing their own thing while a woman inside the bus, pulling petals of a bouquet of poppies. Walking past he just sort of glared.

There was a small TV in the kitchen and the news was on. Three of the Mummies had just been found dead, in different places across the city. No one noticed.

Somebody asked if she wanted to talk and led her to a bedroom where she unpacked her bag and showed him all of her tricks. They started fucking "Say it baby. Say I'm your backdoor man."

"Ough yes. You're my backdoor man" and other men came in, one wearing a snake skin suit and they all took turns.

"Oh god I love you Maddy."

"Haha your friend is long gone honey. We sent him packing."

All of a sudden she snapped to. "What? Wait, where the fuck am I?" she stood up throwing the man on her off.

"Well, lasted longer than eight seconds. I'd say I'm straight" and he laughed putting his pants on the other guys standing around laughing with each other.

"...you fuck a goat one time..." said someone finishing a joke.

She started to cry. She didn't really know what happened. There was a body in the corner with foam coming out of the mouth, arms crossed with a bottle of benzi's beside him. Leaving she took a pair of shades to cover her tears, put her dress back on and left forgetting her bag wishing Maddy was with her running into the empty street.

The Alibi

She had left the device she was showing him on the kitchen counter and one of the other Roaches had found it and was carrying it around with him when he went to find his buddies. Their drummer met up with the singer and their rhythm guitarist in the bus where they were dosed out of their minds trying to light a joint.

The drummer showed it to them. "Hey guys, look what I found."

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure, but it looks pretty interesting. Here" he said handing it to one of them who inspected it.

"Hey look it's got a place to be plugged in. I wonder what it does."

He reached across the dash to plug it in and it lit up spinning like it does, the center glowing.

"Wow."

"Real pretty."

"Hey, I've got an idea" said the singer to Harry who had been making his thumb bloody trying to strike the lighter as he ground it against the flint.

They were sitting closely together and Jack reached across, steadying himself against Harry's knee and tried to light the joint on the light emanating from the center of the device.

There was a brilliant blue flash of light and a shock jumped across the three of them zapping their drummer solidly. Everyone came to dazed. A few moments passed when Jack realized the joint was lit and shrugged proceeding to take a few drags before passing it.

"Here Tito, it looks like you could use a little."

"Jesus what was that?" Although fucked, the guitarist had now noticed his hand was bleeding and proceeded to wrap it using

a first aid kit which was onboard. "Hey fellas. Take a look at this" he said reaching beside himself.

"What is it?"

"A photograph. It's dated Burbank, September 23rd, 1911."

"I think we've traveled to the future!"

"And Raoul then, he must be dead!"

"Nonsense, this would be the past my dear boy" he said polemically. "He hasn't even been born yet."

"Oh no. This is terrible" said the drummer hungdog pulling a book out of his pocket. "I found this too. If we're in the past than it's from the future. If we read it we could cause a time paradox."

"But think of the power fellas. Back in our time, the prefiguring" said the singer with an evil look in his eyes.

"You wouldn't" Tito replied.

"Oh but I would, hand it here" he said taking the book paging through it.

"What are we going to do?" asked the guitarist.

Looking up from the book with a deep sigh their singer said forlornly "I'll roll another joint."

Redemption Song

She found Maddy high as a kite wandering around in the middle of the street.

"Hey, I can carry that for you if you want."

"Yeah? Thanks. What happened to yours?"

"Oh fuck! I forgot it at the party."

"All the drugs are in there" Maddy said trying not to sound upset. He was happy to have Cat back.

They lucked out finding a cab and took it downtown, Maddy fishing the bills Caitlyn had given him out of his pocket handing them to the driver.

"Do you know where we are?" he asked her getting out of the cab.

"Skid row."

They were standing outside the Staples Center somewhere around eighteenth.

"I thought that was Portland, how can there be two?"

"This is America, anything is possible" she said sarcastically.

"Where are we going to go?"

"I don't know." Caitlyn directed Maddy to the bus stop. "Let's just get on the bus and ride."

Family Tradition

They split the kids up and drove them around peppering them with questions hoping for information on a big secret anarchist plot.

They stopped at some strange staging area. Maddy couldn't see too well.

"You want a soda?"

"Sure?" Maddy was surprised, he was dying of thirst.

"What kind?"

He thought for a moment. "Orange."

They had to pour it into his mouth as he was still in handcuffs and started giggling because it's silly then they can't help but start laughing too. They are trying to stay serious.

It was late and quiet in the hall. Beige cinder block walls were adorned only with government posters for bullshit like the importance of reading and dental hygiene.

"Check-ups help" one poster said with a young kid mouth open wide and white furry latex covered hands elbows deep in his mouth.

"We are just going to do a little intake interview."

"What's your name please?"

"William."

In a small room with a desk, two chairs and a computer the man who seemed to remind Maddy of someone smiled insincerely.

"When was the last time you had a tetanus shot?"

"Uh recently I think. Last year."

"Have you ever been tested for TB?"

"Yeah."

They pricked his skin, no reaction.

"Ok this is a vitamin shot, there's also a vaccine against TB in it."

Maddy didn't feel like he had a choice and nodded yes.

"Roll up your sleeve please." The man injected him and finished making notes on a clipboard, filling in boxes on the computer screen before a guard led Maddy to a cell.

"Roll up your sleeve please." The man injected him while he finished making notes on a clipboard and filling in boxes on the computer screen before a guard led Maddy to a cell.

"If it gets too weird you can always exit" the guard said with a grin closing door. It locked shut.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

They put a strobe light in the room before he passed out and started playing Skinny Puppy. Maddy didn't understand why they were rewarding him.

One of the guards said "What the fuck is wrong with these kids?" but Maddy's head was still melting and he thought of Thabius and started dancing like any other Saturday night.

The last thing Maddy could remember someone came into the room and barked at him "What are the plans?!" Maddy mumbled just before passing out "to have a good time?"

One of the guards said "I don't think it's working."

California Love

Maddy woke up in dirty prison underwear and nothing else. A pile of blankets lay at the edge of a concrete bench he was lying on. The room was bare grey concrete with a steel drain in the floor and nothing else. It was freezing and bright fluorescents glared overhead.

He never would have put these on himself. They were disgusting and too big, he would have gone commando as he always does, especially considering the track marks. It made him worry about what they had given him and what had happened since then. He was sore and had no idea how much time had passed. Like a casino there were no clocks or any way to tell time. He assumed since he was booked late, at least a day had passed.

In fact, it had been two.

A guard came by as he heard the door unlock minutes after he woke, handing him something to wear and before Maddy could finish dressing the man said "Lets go."

The Bullheads And The Asslegs

"Fuck not again."

Dressed in scrubs and playing with coloring books Caitlyn was asking some guy to tell her a story.

"He's the best" she confided to Maddy.

"In 2012 a post-nuclear, apocalyptic future-wasteland: One man, with thick blond hair and a kilt..."

"That's not how it goes tell it right!" a girl exclaimed.

"I'll tell it" said Maddy confidently "as best I can remember. It was told to me as a lullaby many years ago. The thoughts are broken but I will do my best." Everyone sat enraptured.

Rock-And-Roll Dreams Will Come True

Ash rose behind them breaking up the once blinding light and Maddy choked on it as they ran through the parking lot dotted with oaks, towards a waiting commuter train 100 yards away.

Getting off, just down the alley with a street sign that said Creeque a light bar lit up the parking lot. "Comon' let's go get your gun." As the cars drove off Caitlyn leaned in and kissed him.

Chapter 10

Incredible, Bizzare, Impossible

The Community Condos smelled like cat piss and the long scary, red carpeted narrow winding hallways seemed to go on forever as they twisted around the building at a gradual obtuse angle.

Caitlyn called Thabius from a payphone in the subway and told him they would be in town for a little bit.

Rumor was it had been a womens asylum at one point until the nineteen seventies when it was converted into apartments. Protected by a locking metal gate there used to be a swimming pool in the middle of the courtyard but it had been in-filled with chunks of concrete and paved over. It was perpetually dim because the residents rinsed out the light bulbs with salt water and use them as meth pipes.

Brothu slept with Rose on a papasan cushion which was supported by milk crates. The floor was littered eight inches thick with a random assortment of mini-donut wrappers, shoes, cigarette ash and plastic doll parts. Maddy woke up to Caitlyn telling him she was going out and he quickly fell back asleep. When he woke back up the room was shut up and had a smell. Brothu's foot was in Maddy's face. Brothu didn't notice Maddy as he grunted on top of Rose. Maddy got up and Caitlyn was in the other room unpacking her bag showing Thabius her ground scores; she pulled out a crusty corset and Thabius fawned. Maddy face palmed "gross" and made his way past them to the kitchen.

Sitting with Thabius was Sabina, telling him a story "I had this dream that we were in Vegas for Christmas and I was sick and you were with two Thai flight attendants from a strip club where they had given you French pornography where shit was constantly on fire or in silhouette. Thabius was laying on the floor. The ladies were calling Austin LaLa and Casino and Casino LaLa and you were telling them about eating middle eastern food where Elvis sat... oh, wait; I guess that actually happened." She was wearing red lipstick and looked beautiful with her black hair, bangs and curves.

Brothu walked out of the bedroom wearing a denim vest covered in patches, a smile and nothing else holding a can of

beer. "Hey I was just coming to see you guys!" Maddy wasn't exactly sure what he meant.

He was balding and scrawny but funny with a glow in his eyes, probably Hep C.

"Why do you always buy that brand? It tastes like shit homie" Caitlyn asked him.

He snorted with a laugh and said "it's just the cheapest kind they have at that market over there pointing out the window." He had just gotten back from the radical faerie gathering at the hot springs. Him and some kids from the AU started Critical Ass, a naked bike ride using bikes from a local department store, which they returned the next day.

Rose was chain smoking and shouted at Brothu. "Get in here and bring me a sandwich!" She relished the irony. Brothu snorting, smiles "You're so full of shit Rose. I have leave for work, make Maddy do it."

"Maddy will you make me a sandwich?" she said turning to him without missing a beat. Maddy looks, "hmm."

"With Brothu leaving that makes you the boi of the house Maddy."

"Yes, of course Rose" he said with cheerful resignation. There was simply no point in arguing the matter.

Thabius owned crates and crates of eclectic vinyl and also slept on a bed supported by a massive stack of milk crates which took up most of the living room and was playing records for his pet gutter punk. He had all kinds of really off beat stuff like a mentally ill burn victim singing childrens songs and his collection of emotive instrumental records; Persuasive Percussion, Giddy Guitar; music to suffer by.

"So Maddy, you never told me about how your trip went" Thabius said staring into a handheld mirror while applying mascara.

"Some guy told us that there was this big government conspiracy to brainwash people using fear and desire."

"It's a little hard to do that with a Buddhist" said Thabius. He was taking Rose, Jenny and Austin to a goth night in a bit where he DJ'd. "You know Maddy" he said taking a pause, "my parents were very influential in New York politics; and of course, growing up in that environment one learns certain things." He set down the eyeliner and picked up some white foundation. "Some of the experiments the Nazi's did with children were horrifying." His speech had an interesting rhythm.

"At least they don't do that shit anymore" looking sidelong and taking a swig of beer feeling worldly.

"Oh no; I'm talking about the things they've been doing ever since." He was looking through a pile of clothes and picked out an outfit. "Well. It's been nice seeing you Maddy but we have to go."

"Uh I was meaning to ask, it's ok if we stay here for a while right?"

Caitlyn was in the kitchen deep frying sandwiches.

"How long."

"I don't know maybe a few days until we can figure something out?"

"I meant in hours. You know I love your company but this is a one bedroom apartment and between Roses boyfriend, my pet and our house guests we simply don't have room." In the kitchen another one of his houseguests was high as a kite painting the kitchen floor with PB&J.

"Oh. Ok um.. cool, well..." Maddy was searching the room with his eyes as if it held answers.

"Do you know where you're going to go?"

Maddy shook his head no, trying to hold back tears.

"Roxanne is coming over in a little bit to pick up some records she lent me. Maybe she would let you stay at her place for a while" he said with an upturn of his voice. "You should ask" and made what could be interpreted as a smile.

He now had his hair up in a bun and rouge on his cheekbones making him look like some kind of gothic vampire victorian school marm.

Austin leaned in whispered to Maddy "If you call her mom and give her tobacco she'll do a favor for you in return." Maddy just stared back, like no.

Maddy felt a slight tinge of relief mixed with anticipation and chugged the rest of his beer while Brothus paraded around the small apartment as Rose chased him with a coat hanger and he howled in delight.

Caitlyn poured her tallboy into a grail shaped object she had found on her walk. "Hey Maddy?"

"Yeah?"

"Where's that vial I gave you?"

"Fuck, I have no idea. I completely forgot about it."

"What?!" her eyebrow raised and then she cracked a smile.
"You're kidding right?"

He shook his head and frantically started patting his pockets and tearing through his bag. He knew it wasn't in there.

"Oh my god. Are you fucking kidding me?!" she said spitting sandwich out of her mouth. "God damnit!!" She put her cup down and pushed him aside looking through the bag, finding nothing and tossing clothes everywhere. "Fuck! Fuck, fuck you Maddy!"

"I'm really sorry. I don't know what happened."

Thabius looked away, eyebrows raised. She stomped toward the front door to walk out opening it to find an older woman with a dog beside her, hand raised about to knock. Well into her eighties she was wearing a suede fringed nehru jacket and a yellow feather boa "Well hello everybody!" the woman said drawing a smile and extended a hand.

What the fuck.

"Hi Roxy" Thabius said without looking up. Rose and Brothus continued their caper.

Caitlyns face flattened, surprised.

"Hi." Stepping back letting Roxanne in Thabius introduced them showing perfect poise. "Maddy, Caitlyn; this is Roxanne Ramirez from Ruidoso. They're friends of mine and would like to know if they could stay with you for a while."

"Sure, I don't mind. Com'on over, I'll make you some French onion soup!"

Caitlyn asked Roxy if she was hungry.

"Sure! Whaddya got?"

"I just made these sandwiches." Roxanne's black and white Australian Shepard Theo was with her. Caitlyn passed her a sandwich and she proceeded to feed most of it to her dog. She didn't seem to have a lot of teeth.

Maddy went to use the bathroom before they left. Inside it was dingy and dim, a yellow bare bulb blinked above the sink and the walls of the bathroom were painted black.

Klaus Nomi was shrieking "total eclipse" in the other room and Thabius was singing along. He had been classically trained in opera although he reminded people he hadn't sung in years.

They got into her station wagon and fell asleep as she drove through the night and woke up to the morning light as she pulled into her driveway.

Engine 54

"Where are we?" Caitlyn asked rubbing the sleep out of her eyes.

"My house, I used to be a teacher. The fire chief grew up in this house."

"It's looks pretty, thanks for the ride."

"You're welcome. Come on in and meet my chickens!"

Caitlyn looked around, the sky was baby blue and there were cacti and rocks in the yard. Sand whipped our eyes and the smell of mesquite smoke filled the air. Small children squealed in delight as they chased each other and the sun filled the sky with orange. "You can stay in the hogan. We use it for ceremonies and guests and stuff. There is wood in the fire box, just use it to start the fire but burn coal. We get it for free from the mine."

"Uh, where are we?" Caitlyn asked again.

"This is Kingston."

"Which would be...?"

"New Mexico!"

"I gotta bit of land out here in the badlands. We should go see my friends sometime" said Maddy.

"Oh fuck!" Caitlyn was pissed.

Caitlyn stewed for a while before realizing it was a better option than anything she could think of and started to adjust her expectations.

"Hey let's go get breakfast! Whaddya think?!" Roxanne asked.

"Awesome!" said Maddy hungry as a fox.

"Sure, we don't have much money left though."

"That's alright. It'll be my treat, we just gotta stop by the bank first. I know a great place in town. Do you like Mexican food?"

Maddy nodded eagerly. She walked out to her mailbox with Theo close behind and told Maddy about the Milkweed bush in her yard which was covered in butterflies as she pulled a check out of the mailbox.

Trippin' On Down The Mountain Side

Driving out of the high pines of the Aldo Leopold National Forest they drove past two vast and trunkless legs of stone and an open pit mine which was a superfund site from open air uranium processing right next to the high school there.

"The hospital gives free services to the residents. It's used as a research lab" explained Roxanne. The hospital was staffed with military personnel.

They drove past a sign advertising "Gas Food Lodging" and a drive-thru liquor store on Memory lane before arriving at Nancy's there.

Munching on homemade chips and salsa which poured out of a recycled plastic ketchup bottle Maddy waited for a plate of stacked red cheese enchiladas with a runny egg on top, Caitlyn ordered a burger and Roxanne got toast and eggs over easy.

There was a velvet painting of a famous TV character wearing a suit on the wall and little framed aphorisms in Spanish and English which Maddy studied while sipping black coffee. They paid their bill and took Highway sixty one home.

Sheep camp, Sheeps

That night they were all sitting on her front porch to a homemade dinner of couscous, salad and steak. Roxy fed the meat to the dog. Afterwards sitting around, Roxanne was cracking dirty jokes and cheering up Caitlyn before bed.

Caitlyn told her about their adventures in Portland.

"Did you enjoy the show?"

"Yeah it was awesome, met some interesting folks. This one guy seemed really familiar but I couldn't place it. Said he'd known me my whole life. I think when we do LSD we all become like psychic family or something" she said trying to sound poetic.

"It wasn't some mysterious psychic bullshit. They were agent's. Probably the agent that was assigned your case."

"Fuck!" Caitlyn was having a rough go it lately.

"Those fuckers love to talk in riddles. They're sick as fuck" said the eighty year old woman.

"That's fucked dude!" Maddy said trying to sound concerned.

"I used to be a spy" she said with a wink and handed them a handmade clay pipe filled with good way smoke she got at the flea market. It had a thumb indentation for a bowl and was made by being thrown into a campfire.

"Is that, true?"

"Yeah I'll tell ya everything I know, and I I don't know nothin'!" and started laughing hysterically before coughing up part of her lung and then asked them "So what kind of music do you listen to?" She led them back inside to a small living room furnished with an old couch, round table and a few wooden chairs which rest on the wooden floor. The kitchen was trashed, full of mouse shit and there were chicks in a cage in the living room.

"I like a lot of alternative" said Maddy.

"Alternative to what?"

"Something commercially viable. Art for art's sake" Maddy said.

There was a framed photograph on the bookshelf of Roxanne and her husband when they were younger standing on a Mayan ruin. The bookshelf was filled with exotic tomes, Dada art and all sorts of things with boxes more full in the back on the enclosed porch where another houseguest Joker slept.

On turntable Maddy put on Soul Revolution Two when she asked to hear asked to hear a Lola Beltran song.

"Do you smoke weed?" Caitlyn asked. They had bought a tiny amount at the park in town.

"Haven't smoked any pot in, oh it's been ages. We love marijuana. I just don't know where to get it anymore." She was talking about her deceased husband who was an amazing photographer, originally from Austria.

Caitlyn packed some into the pipe and handed it to her. They never seemed to run out of pot, and when they did it seemed more of a strange joke than a serious problem.

Roxy took one small hit and you could see the greatest wave of relaxation rush over her.

"Do you want anymore?" Caitlyn asked after a few minutes.

"Oh no, not now I'm fine. Just let me know if you can get anymore of that cannabis."

Outside, the yard was watched over by a standard issue garden gnome which was wearing a sombrero someone had placed on him.

Maddy asked her about a photograph of a beautiful young woman on a camel.

"That was taken in Morocco, we also spent time in Iran back when it was safe to go there as an American. My husband was making chalk drawings in Cairo on the ground for money and made a lot. People would walk by and he'd get a lot of notes. Notes for a dance party they were having, a gay thing. We did a lot of traveling. After the war lots of people wanted to live in America. This is before the world started getting everything; washing machines, the movies, it was materialism, they thought Americans had it all. This shocked a lot of people all over the world."

They sat and listened at her knee.

"Women wore short skirts, American women were considered easy, it's brash style with it's looseness, even in France the place you think of when you think free love. The Arabs went berserk any time they'd see an American tourist they'd think 'I can fuck her, and they tried. A lot of the young travelers would capitalize on it. You want dope? You can fuck me, a sandwich? Boy, girl, it didn't matter."

The kids nodded along. "Then they made it harder, they made students take up debt and you had to start paying it off immediately so you could no longer take the year trip to Europe."

"What do think about Pastrami?" Maddy asked.

"Oh he always was a sellout. It was very dangerous back then if you were political. Murders, there were lots of murders. So, I'm a University student, I love Abbie Hoffman and we see him standing outside Berkley Bookstore where we stole the book. Curly hair, big curly hair... bunch of rich kids" Roxy said.

"You're always privileged when you have friends" Caitlyn replied. "Hey, do you think I could use your shower?"

"Yes, the bathrooms in there" pointing behind her.

Joker brought out a guitar and started showing Maddy how to play Horse With No Name.

Caitlyn went into the bathroom and began to disrobe turning the faucet when nothing happened. She came out with a towel wrapped around her. "Um, the waters not working?"

"Oh I forgot, I turned it off, it wastes too much" she walked past Cait outside to turn it back on. Caitlyn was relieved, got in and waited a while for it to heat up before giving up when she realized that there was no way there was going to be any hot water, it was ice cold.

Evenings Empire

Inside the hogan the six walls flickered with fire from the barrel stove. It was cut crosswise and placed in the middle of the dirt floor. A mop rested against the wall and an illustrated Margret Atwood book was the only accoutrement. On the wall hung a tapestry of Jesus among sheep where a leather pouch of dried juniper rested and Maddy opened it and grasping a handful threw some on top of the stove filling the air with beautiful fragrance.

They cuddled together, warm in a pile of blankets, the coals glowing orange in the grate. A house shaped alone by hands of mud and straw over beams and wattles.

Maddy went outside to get more coal from the bin. On his way back across the dirt yard he was startled by a white wolf. It seemed to be hovering above the ground. He hurried back inside.

The kettle on the stove was filled with water and began to boil. He threw some of the juniper in a mug and made some tea. Drinking it Maddy begun to feel dizzy and laid down on the couch.

Way Up On The Continental Divide

The next day they found Roxy collecting cigarette butts outside and Caitlyn shared some Perique blend tailormades she had with her. Roxanne asked them if they would like her to make some onion soup.

"Actually we're ok. I think we are going to go out for a bit."

"Ok have fun. I'll see you later. If I'm not here when you get back you can get in through the French doors, I'll show you the trick to unlock it."

They went out exploring the town and at the coffee shop met a man who offered them a job in the corn fields. Roxanne wasn't there when they returned and left a note thanking her for her kindness. The idea of moving further and further off grid made sense and the less of the trail they left, the better.

Zed'ach'i

He drove them to a trailer park in town and they went inside a warm home and sat on the couch. His parents were in the other room, the man at the table watching the news, the woman wearing an apron was preparing a small feast.

There was a bowl of pinons on the table and they helped themselves to some while he told them the family would all be by later.

Soon enough a couple of teenagers walked in followed by their dad. There were glad greetings all around and everyone was happy to see each other, it wasn't everyday they got together. His mom started pulling trays of food out of the oven. All manner of casseroles cheesy things, buffalo wings. Wonderful stuff and they all sat around eating and talking until it was time to go back to their own homes.

His father who was well into his age had a rhythmic style of walking and was suffering from some sort of lung problem. Maddy fixed some tea for him with Oregon grape root, schizandra and a few other things and his coughs became productive. His wife was tearfully happy. "The medicines and cough syrups the doctors here give him do nothing. You have to tell me what is in that tea."

He had brewed it with some things he had with him along with a personal size French press which he wrapped in a towel after pouring it to allow it to steep for an extended period. He wrote a list down and the man told them it was time to go.

Gwivi

In the Moenkopi valley Caitlyn was leaning against a fallen cinder block wall, smoking a cigarette. A dilapidated truck camper where they slept rested on the sand and a shack stood across from it. Dust kicked up in gusts and sand found its way into their mouths. They had just made a lunch out of lovingly prepared piki, and Vienna sausages. It tasted like ash in her mouth.

Flat plateaus rose above them on both sides about one hundred fifty feet high. The canyon widened out before narrowing again and appeared to contain multitudes. It was a landscape unlike anything on Earth. Purples and oranges and blues and greens swirled around them with the water from Moenkopi.

They had to work the sandy soil, it was mostly sand actually. Digging irrigation trenches and pulling up old stakes for a new field, every shovelfull just rolled back into the ditches they were trying to dig. It was futile.

"Every year it keeps getting less. They keep taking all the water for the coal but we need it for the corn. I set up a pump this year from the river but it even runs dry sometimes. That's never happened before as long as anyone can remember." Something told Cait these people had a very long collective memory.

Exhausted they were released from work for the afternoon. The man issued them 22's upon arriving telling them they would need them. "There's a box of ammunition in the top drawer" he told them and loading the tube magazines, putting a few more shells into their pockets headed across the narrow, oddly shaped canyon.

Maddy looked down and noticed a strange circle in the sand which had been matted by the wind, a few hundred meters further they found another. A set of concentric rings of varying width millimeters thick, perfect circles. A jackrabbit jumped out from behind sage and they wasted several shots. The

lightening fast rabbit disappeared into a hole in the stone face. It was hollow?

They didn't know what to make of it. They had really never seen anything like this place. Ever. They walked back to the camper and set the rifles in the closet inside.

Maddy went to gather a bucket of water from the river and quickly did some wash while Caitlyn laid down. Setting the clothes out on a line he put up using twine he found in the camper he washed using Castile soap they kept with them.

They were sharing the pack and Caitlyn wore the same pair of coveralls, shirt and bra everyday without removing them. On Maddy's insistence she put on one of his t-shirts and washed hers emptying their pockets and took the road towards Moenkopi, the town.

Caitlyn was singing Bob Marley loudly and beautifully as they walked and a young man inside a red pickup by the main road motioned to them.

Holding his fists in front of his face waving one over the other, the international sign for sparking a bowl. Cautiously approaching the vehicle he asked them if they smoked pot. He invited them to ride along with his young wife and child. Stoked.

They drove out to the rim of a canyon at the top of the city which overlooked the highway into Flagstaff. The three of them exited the vehicle and walked down a deer trail. It was little more than eight inches wide and followed down the rim of the abyss to a hidden dug out, a sort of cave buried half way in the plateau. The drop was sheer and high.

"There is a dance tonight, you see that ridge over there?" pointing to a small plateau a few miles away. "Come by after midnight."

Caitlyn looked at Maddy and they both smiled.

Hero Twins

They approached the mesa in the dark, following a winding dirt path where they were surprised to see a long line of women and children outside which led into a kiva which had a wood stove near the center.

Getting into the end of the line it started to move and eventually they were inside.

The kiva was warm and people were sitting together in rows, shoulder to shoulder. There was a little chatter but it was pretty quiet.

A man came up to speak for a moment explaining the Katchinas would be along soon. They were, descending the ladder in the middle of the round room.

The Katchinas, a handful, performed a dance for the crowd making various motions that would seem to indicate things like hoeing and planting, while making grunting type noises. They wore bells which jingled in unison with the rhythmic movements, emphasizing their actions.

Various groups performed similar dances throughout the night, some of them tossed snacks to the crowd, small bags of popcorn, psychedelic sugar cookies that were multicolored and spiraled before returning up the ladder. The Katchinas all night inside the kiva until morning.

Maddy and Caitlyn sat quietly in reverence to this sight.

Afterwards they wandered back to camp through the canyon. A strange light hovered above the plateau, perfectly still illuminating nothing around it. It spooked them and they remembering what a native woman had told them when they were in Canada "Always keep a song in your heart." Cait

started singing loudly to both comfort herself and perhaps placate or drive away the strange orb.

Upon arriving at the camp the same orb was now a distance off, hovering perfectly still above the canyon hundreds of meters off. It was impossibly difficult to judge the distance of this light; it was very strange as it illuminated none of its surroundings.

Caitlyn pulled out her rifle and emptied the magazine into the air, turned the radio on full and lit a bonfire with some dry logs which had been stored there, what otherwise would have been considered a waste of fuel. She had seen the landholder doing similarly when he was there.

Maddy asked her what she thought they should do, the orb was still hovering.

"Make dinner I guess, fuck it if the orbs going to keep me from eating."

They began to prepare some grub and noticed it had left after a time. Comforted it was gone, they sat near the fire when the land holder pulled up drunk as a motherfucker. He had been riding his tractor in circles out in the fields and had finished off the better part of a case of beer.

"We went to bean dance tonight" said Cait.

They asked him if he knew any stories and he responded in the affirmative but refused to tell them any. He said it wasn't the right time of year.

Maddy began to tell him about the circles they saw in the sand while they were out rabbit hunting; and then about the lights, sort of.

"Have you ever seen any strange things while you were out here?"

Many people lived either in Tuba or proper houses, there weren't many that still lived in or near the corn fields.

He nodded yes before burping out a yep. "All the time. I asked my great grandparents the same question and they told me they have been seeing strange things in the cornfields for a long time."

"Like what?" Cat asked.

He paused "a metallic cigar thing in the air."

"Should we be worried? I mean is it positive or negative?" They were trying to explain as best as possible, he was fucked and seemed slightly confused.

"Mostly positive."

Caitlyn pried further, "What about the fifth world?"

He took a long swig of his beer finishing it.

"There is no fifth world. Just four. You know the medicine wheel? There are only four sections. Not five."

"And after that?" Caitlyn asked politely.

"That's it" the man said lobbing the can into the fire.

They had round steak marinated in brown sugar, ginger and soy sauce and threw one on the fire for him. He was really excited and kept asking them how they got it like that. They gave him the recipe and he began to speak a little.

"They are dancing prayers into the earth. Keeping it in balance. That's what my grandfather believes. Some people believe the world is kept through prayer and each footstep sends energy into the earth."

Caitlyn told him they were thinking about leaving after what they saw.

"I can come back and give you a ride into town in a few days, if you want. How do you feel about that?"

"Fine" she said not wanting to disagree at all, she had a slight notion people in this town didn't want them around and they might not be there in a few days either way.

He left that night and the kids cuddled under Maddy's unzipped sleeping bag in the camper as the wind whipped against it throwing sand against the side. There were strange noises outside the camper all night and what sounded like across the plateau as well, but again it was very difficult to distinguish the source.

Lying awake all night Caitlyn trying to drift to sleep but was unable to keep from thinking about the sounds. Maddy was doing the same and as soon as the sun rose she lept out of bed.

"Fuck this place I'm getting out of here, you can come with me or stay I don't care" she was spooked, and pissy.

"Dude, I feel the same way."

She seemed a little relieved, he thought maybe she was scared because she was worried he actually might want to stay? She thought she wasn't worth the trouble and maybe she was right but Maddy had no interest in hanging around by himself.

Besides, it was nearly impossible to get the same kind of spange and opportunities as a single guy. Without a woman to validate his existence most people assumed he was a serial killer on the run.

The Hailla Gala Ball was in a week and a half, they had an invitation from Erenagh's to work so they could show up a few days, no problem. There's always plenty to do on the farm.

They hiked out of the canyon and hopped freight southbound out of town into Flag.

Putting their thumbs out they quickly got a ride in the back of a pickup truck towards Phoenix eventually making it to Deming trying to hop without a shift change or phone number.

They got out at Walmart and scoring some cardboard, pulling a Sharpie out of the pack she made a sign and began flying it, mostly getting bottles of water with bible verses taped to them. One person gave them a granola bar and someone else gave them six dollars.

Having not eaten much in the last few days, between the heat and the hiking they were starving. She folded the sign and handed it to Maddy. "Here" she said.

He kind of thought she wanted him to stay out in the blistering heat with it but fuck that. He followed her across the parking lot to a Wendy's where they sat in the air conditioning and ordered five things off the dollar menu, sales tax left them with about fifty cents in their pocket.

They saw Joker with a bike talking to a couple in the parking lot, also with bikes, one outfitted with a ratty trailer filled with gear.

"Hey!" he said smiling and waving to them in his gruff voice, grey beard and shaggy ponytail which announced him. "Hey how are you guys doing? I haven't seen you in a while."

They were real glad to see a familiar face. Roxy's house was many miles away.

"We're all right. It's great to see you. What are you up to?" Cat asked

I'm trying to get rid of this. I got a bunch but I don't know what to do with it. I did a job for some guy and then he said he was only able to pay me with this.

"What is it?"

"Chiva." He pulled out a package and showed them a large lump of tar. Caitlyn looked at Maddy like what do you think? Maddy kind of shrugged like I don't know.

"Uh, we don't have a lot of cash" an understatement.

"Here, for being such a help to Roxanne." Joker tore of a piece and handed it to her wrapping it in a cigarette pack cellophane. "Did you hear about what happened to her?"

Caitlyn's new found smile dropped, she knew it wasn't going to be good, expecting to hear she had been arrested for something stupid. She had been 86'd from the college campus, god only knows why, before meeting them.

"No, I haven't. What?"

"You know how when she went to Tuscon for Occupy she got a possession charge right?"

"No."

"Well she had to go back for court this week. She got hit by some SUV."

Caitlyn looked concerned "Is she ok?"

He just shook his head and started crying.

Chapter 11

Mile Zero

Halfway into California the train rolled straight into a yard where a bull was slowly but surely checking each car with his flashlight starting from the engine and working his way back. The yard was filled with a thick layer of what could have been freshly laid gravel, very deep. They hopped off opposite side of the bull and up a steep embankment. It was very difficult to walk across the yard with the heavy pack as Maddy's feet sank deep into the gravel. It was like walking through loose sand. They were sure the bull could have heard them in the quiet midnight. Panting at the top of a hill they crouched waiting, wondering if he would seize them until the familiar click of the cars pulled together as the engine began. Scrambling down hill they got back onboard.

The train rode through the night and into the morning.

They got off before a yard came up in So-Cal and called Kobb's place. Caitlyn was feeling ungrounded and wanted to talk to a familiar, wiser voice. He always knew just what to say, plus she really liked him. Kobb's son answered the phone, "Who is this?"

"Caitlyn, I met you at the barbecue this summer. I sung during the all star jam?"

"Oh yeah, hey what's up Cait?"

"I was wondering if your dad was around?"

There was silence on the line. "Jeremiah?"

"So I guess you didn't hear the news. Dad dressed up as a mechanic and snuck on base stealing one of their copters. He was trying to break out that Harvard professor who was dosing everyone, with the help of the Dippies and the Jaguars. I guess the plan was to fly him to the coast and take a small sailboat to Algiers but it didn't work out. They crashed into the prison complex when they got close."

Caitlyn was silent for a while. She tried not to cry. Gulping in breath "Um" and chocking a little "Oh." was about all she could muster.

"Hey what are you up to right now?"

She took a deep breath and tried to switch gears "Maddy and I are headed to the Flying Pig for the Hailla Gala Ball. We were going to see if you knew anyone headed up there we might be able to get a ride with."

"Hm. Well actually you are in luck. My friend is sailing up the coast and I need someone to meet him since my dad isn't around. If you could do that for me I could arrange for someone to give you a ride to the Ball."

"Um, yeah? We could do that, sure. No problem. Where's he heading in to?"

"Um, you'll have to call me when you get closer. Can you get to the 101 near San Diego and call me from there?"

"Uh, yeah we're near Long Beach right now."

"Alright great. Hey, it's nice talking to you again Caitlyn."

Caitlyn didn't question the synchronicity of everything. At this point it all just seemed like it fwas supposed to happen. If life really was like a movie she just hoped hers had a happy ending. It had been pretty exciting so far, it seems like the only time she was disappointed is when she didn't trust it would work out, one way or another.

She spent their last fifteen bucks on a disposable phone and a squirt gun. They could hitch a ride out to the highway easily enough but a phone call wouldn't be possible unless they brought their own and sat at a fast food place eating shitty burgers and just chilling out for a minute and asked someone for directions.

"Hey? Could you please tell us which way to 101?"

"Where are you trying to get to?"

"I'm not sure exactly, actually."

"Well you can't get lost if you don't know where you're going."

"The Pancake Lodge?"

"Yeah. Follow Lincoln county road #440 until you get to the highway and follow it to the end."

"The end?"

"Where the highway meets the ocean."

They walked for a while taking turns carrying the pack until they got near the onramp, stuck out their thumbs and Caitlyn pulled out the phone and called Jeremiah.

She got off the phone as a car pulled up and told the woman driving where they were headed, she said she could take them. After a brief conversation she handed them twenty bucks, feeling sorry for them. They were looking rather pathetic at this point.

They got out thanking the woman and walked down to the beach to watch the sunset.

The Sermon

They waited in the sand and a sedan pulled up on the sea wall in an empty lot. Caitlyn waved her cellphone in the air and he

saw the light and came down carrying a backpack. Tucker wore an alligator tooth around his neck and they watched and waited. There was a stillness in the wind.

As they waited Tuck stuck two rolling papers together into an 'I' shape. He was smallish and carried a tempered exuberance. Dressed in a dirty, torn beige t-shirt. His dreads draped over his shoulders. "I'm going to start a church. It's called Bro's Church of Freedom" he said filling his palm with crumbled cannabis.

Maddy started to freak out a little. "It's the mind control man."

"Then let's take control. Here, have some of this." Tucker handed him a thermos of San Pedro tea laced with coca.

Picking up a box of matches from the sand he pulled a lantern out of the bag and checking the time lit a fuse.

"It's just a lamp Maddy. Chill."

Upon the beach as if to make the invisible plain it looked magic. The lantern was made of a large coffee can which at one time was filled with frozen water whereupon it was carved.

Tucker had just gotten back from Ocala Florida and told them about his church.

"Do unto others as you would do unto bro. It was like the biggest wave I have ever ridden in my life man, it's a looking glass wall. You're either on one side, or the other. You can't be on both."

"What if I break it?" said Maddy.

"You escape the mental prison, they try and put you in physical one. Loose lips sink ships."

"I think that's the idea" said Caitlyn.

"Fuck this rowboat of the damned" Maddy responded.

"Well haven't you grown" Caitlyn said looking at him.

"There are forces at work here beyond what we can see. Not all of them are friendly" he said in a more serious tone. The light flickered and the transistor radio was tuned to a station which played so softly it could not be heard as the batteries faded into oblivion.

A meteor ripped through the sky filled with darkness. And soon there were more.

"It's the Perseids. They are peaking tonight" he said casually taking a long drag off the cone and passing it to Maddy.

"It's a sacred marriage. The priestess spent time with the dead to renew the agricultural year. There is a hidden recipe alluding to it in bible. Just sex won't do it though, you need love. Real deep abiding love. So many of the rituals and symbols in Christianity are almost identical to ancient beliefs. It's like they co-opted it but took the sacrament out."

"Why wouldn't they want people to connect with the higher power?"

"The devil's in the details. They shifted from sacrifices to the gods to sacrifices to the government. Making necessary the need for private property and a loss of freedom. If they didn't carefully select every year the wheat which supported the workforce it would revert back to a rotten weed. The tree of life and the diaspora of the garden."

"The Spirit intercedes through wordless groans" Caitlyn said, connecting the dots.

"The Bible, the New Testament isn't exactly what it seems. After the flood that's what they were trying to resurrect, the mystery schools."

Caitlyn and Maddy both weren't sure if he was talking about them.

At precisely eleven the phantom glimmer of a wooden sloop, the Jumbis approached and they waded into the swollen tide and a man tossed a small package off the boat to Caitlyn who caught it.

"Com'on time has come up" Maddy was pretty fucking high and getting higher.

He was watching the sky and Caitlyn pinched him "Hey hippie!" and laughed evilly while Tucker continued smoking his joint. "It keeps talking about breath. What if our universe is like one giant expanding and contracting breath. Every time it collapses we all collapse with it, only to be reborn through the millennia again in a countless cycle? You know time gets slower closer to the outer edges of the expansion you get and faster towards the center?"

They weren't paying attention and he just kept talking.

"What if there is a consciousness that persists thought out these cycles, what if it was possible to join it? What if our time was limited?"

Caitlyn responded with a question finally looking at him between teasing Maddy and looking at the stars.

"Can our souls get high?"

Tucker looked at the roach he was holding and passed it to her after a quick nod thinking to himself. He looked drunk, Maddy had drunk about half the thermos thoughtlessly because it was warm and passed it to Tucker who chugged the rest of it.

"Can our souls fuck?" she said with a malicious smile and quickly turned around and pinched Maddy again who giggled before squealing "stop it!"; she grabbed for his dick but it was too dark for Tuck to see.

He opened the package pulling a few things out and lit the paper it was wrapped in on fire in a ball in the sand.

"They say the Garden of Eden parable is really about agriculture. The first time in human history wealth existed creating a surplus which could be used to trade for a man's time. It's what desertified Eden by increasing salinity in the poor draining soils. Everyone was a hunter and gatherer before that" he said stuffing some things into his pockets. He flicked the roach into the sand before him.

Caitlyn had gone down to the sea and filled her squirt gun and was now squirting Maddy and got bored and went after Tucker. Wiping salt water off his face he told her "Here, for coming out here with us." She wasn't sure who us was but reaching out received two vials of dose along with an old folded crisp Benjamin. "There is someone at the ball, deliver it to them. You will know them when you see them." She shrugged and immediately put the other one in the squirt gun.

Bro's Church of Freedom and Lodge of Pancakes

"Hear. Man?" Maddy was too dosed to understand what he was even trying to say.

"Stick with the plan" Cait announced.

"I feel sea sick" Maddy said.

"Let's go this other way" Tuck informed them. "The car's over here man."

"Gotta keep a step ahead and off the wall" he said. "Let's play hide and seek. Now!" He grabbed Cait's hand. The two of them ran off leaving their ride.

Maddy lay down beside her and they started making out. "Shh."

"What?" Caitlyn stiffened up, pissed and a car rolled past shining a spot light over the beach. The Jumbis was a good ways off shore by now.

"Something new" Maddy told her.

"How do you?" when someone called her name. They were lying against the embankment while the twilight shyly played.

"Pure fucking magic."

Tuck had just made it to the turbo-charged stationwagon and opened the doors when he was pulled to the ground and arrested for felony possession among other things, the keys falling on the front seat. The cops disappeared closing the door to the sedan, happy with their catch.

"Its music. The world is music."

"It could have been the wind" she said.

"My job is to shed light" he said holding the burnt out lantern.

"Hurry up. You're moving way too slow" she said pulling a needle out of her arm, as if he was the one slowing them down. Maddy took a new insulin syringe out of it's packaging and took the slightly less than half torn off piece of tar and heated it using the same spoon and cotton.

"We don't have to run. Our mission's complete" he said leaning against her shoulder.

"I want to hold your hand" she looking pouty. Maddy whispered "don't be afraid" and laughed while he calmly looked into the sky as the drizzle stopped. "We are TFH remember?"

"You proved every word you said."

"Don't ever forget the power of enduring friendship" he said but she had already nodded off. He wandered casually into the parking lot and wrote on the back of a truck with his finger.

Where the waves rolled in and overlapped the past and future collided, making the present; the thing surfers sought and rode. For what to some is nothing more than saltwater dashed upon the beach. Long Shore Drift.

Stay Attuned

He walked up to where she lie and poked her with a stick "You get what you come for?"

Cait mumbled "Mhrmgood times."

"Yeah. That's the only thing left to do."

"Lets go to the show" her arm shot up and waved around a little bit he drug her up and they walked to the sedan. Maddy pulled a thick rubber band out of his shirt pocket and picked a spark plug up off the ground placing it on the corner of the back window, using the rubber band opened the car.

A Private-Public Party Ship

Caitlyn got in the passenger seat and mumbled "was, and is not, and yet is."

"Whole heap of crazy" Maddy said starting up the vehicle using the keys which were still inside.

Caitlyn sat up and put on her seatbelt "I got fall down drunk, I'm sorry but I was lying down the whole time though, so it wasn't really an issue?" She turned towards the window and curled up; he turned the heater on.

Things seemed to appear in the middle of the road, floating and spinning. Bonus points. "I don't think I'm good to drive. I haven't slept in like a day."

"You're fine" she said rolling over again on the heated seat.

Clouds curled around the rocks and the waves as the pine trees rose up along the edge out of the fog bank. They stopped by a gas station off the highway in the middle of the forest. Maddy went inside to pee and Caitlyn bought a loaf of bread, stealing a pair of sunglasses.

Maddy came out and found Caitlyn in the car munching on bread shaped like one of the rocks which was rising out of the water.

"Bread."

Chapter 12

American Reality

Out in the middle of nowhere an electric Cal State road sign announced "Traffic Congestion Ahead - Next 3 Miles."

They approached what appeared to be the main gate, a large steel cattle number. Green pastures buttressed the quiet country road. Behind the gate the Flying Pig Farm owned four hundred rolling acres with the Long John river running through it.

They were expecting like, you know a small house party or something. There were tens of thousands of people there. Parking the car right outside the gate they were greeted by a stoned, balding dude.

"Hey you guys gotta get out of here. The show doesn't start for a few days. Scram!"

"Um.." Maddy stuttered. "Dan Erenagh sent us. He said there was a party?"

"We love Erenagh why didn't you say so? Come on in. Let me get you started. You guys here to work?"

"Yeah, they said eagerly."

"What would you like to do?"

Caitlyn was assigned recycling crew, it's what she wanted.

"..uh kitchen?" Maddy didn't understand why anyone would choose to deal with garbage when you could be working where the food was.

"Sure thing. Come with me, we'll get you set up."

The kitchen was a lively scene. Volunteers were scrubbing dishes and Maddy was both surprised and delighted to see the Queen who greeted him. Everyone was on a strict work schedule which was posted in the kitchen but the Queen simply asked if he could bake, handed him a recipe and pointed him to a Hobart.

The kitchen was a temporary set-up but it was fully functional. These people had amazing skills for hosting parties. It looked like it was a permanent building but with a few days work the entire thing could be disassembled and put into storage. All the supplies were on wire racks along the wall, there were commercial refrigerators towards the back and large refrigerated trucks were kept running with electrical power outside, full of produce.

There were haybales surrounding port-a-johns away from things and behind the kitchen was a pallet stacked with electric energy drinks, free for the taking for anyone with backstage access.

Caitlyn had disappeared to set up a tent and was shown around by two kind kids with a beautiful setup. A tent for sleeping and portable gazebo shaded with tapestries.

Maddy was humming along in the kitchen and had to multiply the recipe. He should have done it on paper first. About halfway through or so he couldn't remember how many times he added things in and hoped for the best forgetting if he'd added ingredients or not and sometimes doubly adding them.

He set the cookie dough in one of the refrigerators and was sitting behind the kitchen on some lawn chairs with a few folks. The fella that met them at the gate, one of the grown children of the farmers and his wife who had a small rv and electricity. Maddy was taking a drag from a vape bag and passed it when the Queen approached him.

"You said you could bake! The cookies came out terribly, we had to throw out the whole batch" it was like forty pounds of dough or something. She was really upset but you could tell she was being very kind about it. She told him he could just do whatever, she didn't want any more help from him.

Maddy felt really bad but also really good. He had never fucked up this bad before and had someone forgive him or be so kind. It was a little thought provoking.

Expecting initially he might be thrown out, or at least sent to the other end of the farm to sort recyclables out of garbage, losing his kind spot behind the kitchen, she just forgave him.

"Hey I want your opinion on something. What do you think?" She said walking over to a pink trailer a few yards away. "I can't decide what we should do with it." It had a washtub nailed to the front of it and a tail painted on the back. It looked like a little pig. It was super cute. Maddy opened up the trailer door and the first step was all rotten. "You can stay in here if you want."

Maddy just said "Mmm." He wasn't too sure. Sitting at a picnic table behind them was Gadget.

Maddy asked him about some plywood and screws and set about trying to hold the floor in place without spending too much time on it and wandered past security waving his wrist at one of the checkpoints. He was covered in a wristbands, showing various levels of access. Several stages provided entertainment twenty-four hours a day for the entire festival.

He came to a small stage with a sign that read 'Big Time'. The man was singing in a strange voice and playing a Ukulele. Maddy watched the entire thing and afterward the man got off stage and mingled with a few folks in the crowd who told them they appreciated his show. Maddy shook his hand when he came near and the man introduced himself "I'm Big Tim. Did you enjoy it?"

"Yeah, that was fun. Hey I have a question though, is Big Time the name of your act?"

"Oh no, just Big Tim. The 'e' is silent."

Maddy looked like he had a sharp pain in his side. He winced holding back a smile.

"Cool, well, nice to meet you" Maddy said forcing a smile.

"Yeah you too!" the man smiled and shook his hand walking off to say hi to someone else in the audience.

Cat and Maddy camped together when they spent time sleeping, which was rare, let alone at the same time.

Caitlyn was sitting at a picnic bench behind the diner in the staff area where the Queen was singing loudly a song about pizza and pasta and pie, pulling things out of the oven. It was summertime in California, having equipment outside was no problem.

Caitlyn got her attention "Hey."

The Queen smiled, "Hi!"

Caitlyn wasn't sure if the Queen remembered her. "I rolled you a joint last time and you didn't like it. It kind of hurt my feelings."

"Yeah well, I tried a joint like that before and didn't like it, so." The Queen shrugged smiling a little.

"Hm" Caitlyn mumbled nodding with pursed lips. She walked over to the lawn chairs where Maddy was sitting and told him she was going to go check out some of the shows.

She wandered towards mainstage and someone came up to her before she passed the security check. She had seen him around but didn't know who he was.

"Hey, You know the Electric Apes?"

"No."

"They're so and so's side project band. They're making a movie and one of the roadies ran off with one of the cameras and a bunch of the footage so they're going to be reshooting a lot of the footage here today."

She felt important because he was telling her this. Like she was supposed to know, like she was part of the crew. She didn't know what to do with the information but it was good to be aware. It seemed like the folks at the fest had made special accommodation for them. The way things were working she noticed people here, who were tight, seemed to look out for each other.

She caught up with Maddy at one of the stages and were watching the music when someone came up to them and said "Your friend is looking for you" pointing through the crowd to some guy.

"That's not my friend."

They instantly realized he was a narc of some kind. "Hey, let's see what he's up to" Cat said to Maddy and they weaved through the people quickly and got behind him as he searched the crowd. He was trying to appear casual while scanning the sea behind his sunglasses.

She took the vial she was given and coming up behind him quickly ran up and dumped the entire thing into an open container he was holding, not paying attention still pretending to watch the show while scanning for them. Maddy watched from a few yards away, terrified, then smiling.

She grabbed his hand and drug Maddy away laughing maniacally. With as much as she had given him it wouldn't take long, or much.

They were getting hungry and it was safe, secure and calm backstage. Wonderful if you could get it.

They went back and showing the man their wrist bands he stopped them for a moment.

"What's the password?" The security hippie leaned in "You know, the password?" as if Maddy hadn't heard him the first time "Password?" Maddy asked squinting at the guy.

The man smiled and let them through.

They grabbed a couple of energy drinks and Caitlyn went to sit with what seemed like a never ending smoke circle while Maddy wandered towards the kitchen to see if he could find anything to eat without arousing the suspicions of any of the workers, trying to look officious.

Every one else on the crew was given meal tickets and very strict instructions. They were only allowed to eat when the staff was served, with their ticket.

He realized he was completely stoked and tried be humble. He was literally filled with love he'd never known before now being treated like family. He never knew what this felt like before but felt fierce about it. He was now part of a pack. He wasn't exactly sure how he'd gone about being adopted but was theirs for life as far as he was concerned and wouldn't let anyone take that feeling from him now he had it.

Play A Song

On mainstage Rich was playing and as he sung he summoned storm clouds around him and lightening flashed in the distance. It didn't rain though.

"I've been to the mead hall I lit up the dragon
With fire all around me I could find no water"

A man with a mask on sort of danced by the crowd.

"Do you know who that was?" Mad had made a new friend backstage, Norma, who was watching the show with them.

He shook his head 'no'.

At The Zoo

After Rich's set they wandered off. Caitlyn found herself sitting between two clowns while Maddy entertained a folk artist who had come in a bus with her family, her husband and their small child. She had lots of curly hair. Dusting off the strings he sung about the mashed potato and stuff like that.

The man in the mask was fussing with some food and rapping about the groove. Maddy was having a hard time finding it when he started playing Me And My Uncle. "That's more like it" he said.

The Queen found Maddy and asked if he wanted to help serve for a while.

"Sure" Maddy chirped. He said hi to Norma who was stirring some pots at a booth and handed Maddy a ladle "Weezy Greezy's doing his show later. I'd really like to see it. Will you come with me?"

"Oh fuck yeah. I wanted to see that."

One of the performers came up and asked what was good.

"All of it."

"So I heard you are a fan?" He asked another woman behind the booth.

"Oh my god! I can't believe you actually came." She shed a few tears of joy and the man gave her a hug and talked to her for a minute before being served up some quinoa and green borage gravy. Performers get meal tickets.

Maddy and Norma found a couple of staff kids wearing orange shirts and waved them over to take over. Somewhere down the path a hurdy gurdy played.

Cupid Agent

Weezy was doing his shtick on stage, talking about nobody, in particular but Maddy was distracted. Norma handed Maddy four tabs of acid and he took two. "Hold on to these for me"

"Arn't you going to take yours?"

"Yeah, I'm just not ready yet."

Maddy was still wearing the faded flower crown. When they got back to the stage where Weezy was performing the show was already over. "Shit."

Norma had taken a liking to Maddy since they met near the vape circle when he first got there. He liked her too, they were fast friends.

Maddy wandered off waiting for the acid to take effect and after some time he felt like maybe it was really weak. Somehow he hadn't noticed his sense of judgment was impaired and took hers too. He decided to go on a mission because shit ain't working and gobbled up too much of everything. Wandering through the fair he met a frat boy with a plastic tub full of sheets.

"Real acid. want some?"

"Yeah" said Maddy. "I just took some but I think it's bunk." Somehow he walked off with a few more hits and took those as well.

"Hey! I lost track of you in the crowd, where did you go? Do you have my acid?"

"I ate it, you didn't seem to want it and mine wasn't kicking in."

"Oh shit." She wasn't sure if she should be worried or laughing.

Meanwhile the man in the mask said to someone "I trust you'll deliver this. We have ways of making sure nobody escapes."

"You can always trust a trickster."

Norma and Maddy walked to main stage and a man who resembled pan had a vial around his neck. She approached him waving, and stuck out her tongue telling Pan "Hey, it's my friend. Go easy he's new."

Maddy stuck out his tongue and the man gingerly placed a drop and a half on Maddy's tongue. Maddy was annoyed. New to where? Here? There? Pan dropped two or three on hers.

"Hey come over here." Norma led him to a rave stage with live DJ's playing some kind of electronic dance music. The acid began to take hold.

"What do you think about the music?"

It was hard to hear her over the bass.

"How do you like it? Cool huh?"

"Yeah it's alright" Maddy was feeling pretty intense and wanted to find someplace a bit more calm.

Norma followed him to a campfire where an old man was playing guitar to a circle of what were obviously hippies. The river rolled behind them.

"Play the one about the silver mine!" Maddy insisted. It took all his comprehension to piece the words together. He reminded himself to control his breathing and felt the day break up into eight parts.

He began to feel vibes radiating out like heat, affecting everyone around, his thoughts become theirs. Drummers came and he brushed them away with wave of hand. They were going to lord over the mellow circle.

The masked man stopped by briefly to dance around the fire for a minute and maybe spook the kids. Maddy was somewhat unimpressed with the parlor tricks.

A couple from backstage came by with a stroller and asked Maddy if he could watch their infants for a few minutes. He simply nodded and they took their twins out of the stroller in stripped red and white onesies and placed them in his lap. The kids sat contented and watched the music. Grown up time.

"These people trust me with their kids?" Maddy thought, careful not to disappoint them. Norma came by after about ten minutes and picked the twins up out of his lap looking him in the eyes. Maddy nodded and a girl came up to him "are you sure?"

Maddy turned around to see her placing them back in their stroller with their parents steadying it. He nodded, his eyebrows furrowed. She didn't realize it but they were all very good friends.

The sun rose over a totem pole with the moon rising opposite one hundred and eighty degree's atop another. Maddy got up

slowly to walk away and Norma trotted up alongside him.
"Where were you going, to leave without me?"

"I wasn't, I just wanted to make a smooth exit without anyone really noticing."

Maddy had a feeling the party would continue indefinitely and whatever was forgotten, no one cared to remember. "I think we did it!" he said redirecting the conversation.

"Did what?" Norma asked curious.

"What we set out to do, of course" he said confidently.

"What's that?"

"Had a good time!" He tried to make it look like he hadn't been hashing it over in his head for a few moments.

"Aaah, Yes!" Norma said relieved. "A good time was had by all."

They walked towards their beds as the sun and moon rose over the ranch.

On the way, under an awning Maddy found a djembe and started playing it when some other dude came up and began to play on the same drum head, somehow they actually sounded fucking amazing. However they did it he was sure he wouldn't be able to repeat the trick again short of similar circumstances when a member of one of the reggae bands came up and slipped Maddy his number.

He quickly lost it before he could even get back home.

Les Petite Rien

Maddy met up with Caitlyn back at their tent. He crawled in next to her wrapping his arms around her, giving her a kiss. She held firm.

"So just how far south do you want to go? I was thinking about going to Mexico." She turned around looking him in the eyes.

"As far as the money takes us."

"How much do we have left?"

"Thirteen bucks, but we can always fly a sign."

"What?! I thought we were doing good. You said not to worry about it!"

"Yeah don't worry about it, we can always fly."

She got pissed and sat up lighting a cigarette.

"You know those things are bad for your health."

"So is running out of money Maddy."

"So what the fuck are you so worked up about? It's not like we ever had any to begin with. Here, you want it? Here is everything we have" tossing a wad of small bills between them.

"This is fucked." She stormed out of the tent. Maddy sighed deeply and rolled over. He needed some sleep.

The dream has always been undead. It was dead when it started.

She came across a man who smiled "Tell me, did you want do it or did they make you?"

She didn't answer.

"You look like you could use a little comfort."

"What do you mean?" She asked him, brow furrowed. The man pulled out the package he had received earlier and handed it to her. "Thank you?"

"This isn't free, it's gonna cost you."

"That sounds about right" she said now walking along side the stranger and they disappeared behind a corner into a stand of pines.

"What about your friend, aren't you worried about him?"

"I'm not worried about nobody."

He started kissing her and she didn't resist. He grabbed her and lied her on the grass behind one of the reefers, near the river.

"...from a beautiful town in Bavaria. You see my father used to work with the bund before the war. Some of us realized that we could never take your country by force. America is unique. It's only country that stands by it's principles, which is why we had to destroy it" the man said grunting as they came together.

"Ugh! Get off me!" She felt disgusted.

Caitlyn walked towards home taking her wages.

Maddy couldn't sleep and wandered through the ball when he thought he heard someone crying.

She had found Maddy.

"Where were you?" he asked.

"Nothing, lets go somewhere just, don't talk. Just hold me." He tried to put his arm around her but felt unusually uncomfortable touching her.

Caitlyn and Maddy walked together. "It's really good to see you" she was carrying a tote bag filled with stuff and things.

"Can I carry that? Let's go home."

"I'm not going yet. I'll be right behind you" Caitlyn said pulling out a kit with her twisted logic to sit behind a truck stuck in the mud.

"This is my movie!" talking about the hippie thing. "I just want a happy ending. Why does it have to be shit to be real?" Maddy asked.

"Because real life is shit Maddy. This is real."

"No!" he started to say when he realized he sounded like his mother. "No, You know what? Fuck it. Let it all be shit. Do what you want" he started crying through his words.

Caitlyn turned to look at him, the anger had left her face to show surprise and regret. A tear showed. Without a word she fell upon him embracing him and his tears stopped. They held each other for a long time as he felt damp tears soak through his shirt.

"Everyone has a fear. You know what mine is? That I'm ordinary" she said prepping a needle.

She took a hit of noz using a cracker. Looking around her she realized she didn't have any water and so drawing some from a nearby puddle shoved the needle into her arm, aloof to his presence.

Turning to look at him her pupils became pinholes in her blue, blue eyes and she whispered "Nothing is revealed" and smiled. "What? You thought I'd say more?"

She breathed deeply through her nose and touched her thick painted ruby lips with her tongue closing her eyes and her shallow breathing got slower, until it seemed to stop "I've never been this tired. . ."

"Oh god." He tried to sit her up. Her body felt heavy and limp in his arms.

"Oh. Fuck. Help!" Maddy screamed but it only came out like a frog's gurgle.

A women was close by and came to see what was up.

"Is she dead?! Look she's still moving!" Her limbs quivered. The young woman pulled a radio out of her pocket and got on the line for paramedics. The next sixty seconds felt like an eternity.

Maddy walked off in a daze still carrying the tote as paramedics arrived behind him.

Old Neighbors of Mind

Somewhere down the road three different bands were parading down the street, some in strange masks with large hats, all interlocking in a non-planned polyrhythm on the pentatonic scale at a distance created the strangest maddest sound in sparkling multicolored outfits; they were playing wildly in and out of tune.

Sitting in the all night café named the Lonesome Valley where he finds the dude in a mask eating purple berry ice-cream called ron con pasas. They had given him a little spoon but he ate it normally with his face. "Do you ever feel like your not doing it right?" he said to Maddy, who sat next to him.

Rich came up and startled them, looking deep into his eyes he said "Who's got the crack?!"

"I got some time?" Maddy replied, he was beside himself and wanted a drink, stat.

"I'm just messin' with you man" said Rich.

"Not as mustardy as I thought" the masked man said to himself.

"Ice cream can be terrible" said Rich.

The masked man continued talking to someone at the bar. "Running a Nightclub is a legitimate business. Now sure it includes some shenanigans from time to time when you're dealing with liquor licenses and bouncers and cops but let me tell you something. It sure beats digging ditches. Actually sometimes you even have to dig a few ditches." He started laughing.

"Especially when your buddies get into trouble" said Rich concerned about Caitlyn, news travels fast.

"Bodies?" said the masked man laughing. "It was fifty years ago, this very day..."

"It wasn't today, that's Sunday."

"It's Sunday? Oh shit I don't know."

"See we're the same old dudes" Rich said taking a drink.

He leaned in and whispered to Maddy. "The reason I wanted to

play those two songs in a row is because they're exactly the same song. Just like I told ya, I hope you're satisfied."

"I've heard all you have to say" said Maddy quietly looking away.

The man in mask was in the middle of telling a joke walking behind the bar "So then the duck said to that drake, there ain't no crawdads in this lake!" laughter broke out and Maddy turned to him.

"Is this your place?"

"Same concerned owner operator all these years" turning to take someone's order.

Rich kept talking "Oh well. They played ya'll. Some people don't need to go through hell to see that heaven is a loving home. Do you have any idea why or what for she died?"

Maddy went from shock to weeping.

"Caitlyns dead?!"

"She won't die, it's not poison" the masked man turned to them and said.

"How do you know?" Rich asked serious.

"I passed it along myself" said the masked man, pulling it back just long enough for Maddy to realize it was Skinner Kobb.

"I thought you were dead?" he leaned in whispering.

"Nah, not me. Crashed it to fake my own death. That's how we were able to get off their radar and get the professor to Algiers with Otter. We put him on a boat."

"Um I was there, I don't remember seeing anything."

"That was just a red herring. We wouldn't have been able to do it without you covering for us."

"What goes 'round comes around" Rich said wishing he had something more drastic to say when they heard the thunder of southbound train.

"Is that your bag?" Skinner asked.

"It's Cait's. I don't even know what's in it" said Maddy forlorn getting his drink and going to sit down. "Is this your place?"

"Same concerned owner operator all these years."

He had a large key ring and Maddy thought he was the janitor of the place for a minute. Kobb started rifling through the bag while Maddy sat down next to the man in the green vest to steady himself, forgetting it.

"Too bad about that girl huh? Give 'em their moneys worth I guess" said the man laughing heartily and turning back to the bar taking a pull from his gin. "So I heard you are the only one to escape the interrogation test huh?"

"Is it not enough what you've done but you have to add insult to injury?" Maddy figured he was some kind of agent, maybe referring to his short time in LA county.

"I guess happiness is just a state of mind. I figure maybe we're even."

"Fuck you."

"Go home boy."

"Whats it matter how far we go?" Maddy asked nastily.

"See that river over there? There's a land on the other side, full of milk and honey where all good children go when they die. You think you're some kind of freedom fighter?"

"I'm an American" stood Maddy grim and tall. The clock rang on the wall.

"What's your name?" Maddy asked him.

"I'd give it to you but I borrowed it."

"Do you want to know mine?"

"I don't need it. I've have several in fact" he pulled out a pistol and shoved it in Maddy's ribcage just as he heard the words "Duck!"

Skinner appeared behind him and out of the tote pulled Maddy's revolver and blew his ass away.

Out across the field the paramedics after assessing her administered some nitro-glycerin. She came to and someone told her "You better hurry; your love is dead" as she was revived. There were rumors spreading on the radio that Maddy had been shot.

While at the rundown bar Kobb said "I have shot the Wendy."

"I think he's dead!" screamed Maddy.

"Calm down. First let's make sure" and with that Kobb emptied the cylinder.

He took off his mask and slipped it onto the body. "They wanted you to burn that guy, so they could take all three of you off market with a single stroke" and before long a sheriff

showed up and announced "Worst case of suicide I've ever seen." The corpse had six holes in it.

Zero

After words they invited Maddy to stay. The wristbands he had for backstage during the show weren't the same ones that would give him access afterword for the breakdown. Cait didn't get one and he gave her his. Once a wrist band was put on it couldn't be taken off without destroying it.

He brought Caitlyn to them explaining she hadn't recieved one but with a simple "nope" they told him she couldn't stay.

No matter how good the offer appeared to live on the ranch with them, he wasn't going to leave his best friend behind. The road sign saying "Warning Drum Circle Ahead - Hippies In Roadway" as they hitched out.

After camping near the Eureka bay she told Maddy about a guy she met during the festival and said they might be able to stay with him. She called him up and after introducing Maddy to him they drove up to his place near Kneeland, a normal looking suburban home in the country.

He couldn't believe he had given up his spot at the ranch.

It was sparsely furnished and the decor was a few years out of date. He showed off his grow show in the garage. It was a sea of green type hydro set up and Maddy pulled out a few promotional liquid nutrient samples and gave them to him.

"Thanks" he said looking them over. "I'm just going into flowering now on some of the plants. I'll use these."

They smoked some pot at the table adjacent to the open, late 1980's kitchen and walking towards the master bedroom he

told Maddy "You can sleep on the couch, there's some movies under the TV if you want."

"I'm going to take a shower" Cait told Maddy while he set up the sleeping bag on the couch and saw her come naked out of the shower in the master bedroom and the door closed.

He was kind of in a state of shock.

The next morning they told him they could give him a ride into town. He packed his bag and got in the truck and they left him in Arcata with a few nugs. The sun was shining brightly in the morning and made a red sky. He was high, and dry. Somewhere a blackbird was singing. He shivered.

Chapter 13
Hills Of Mexico

Between Their Loved Home And The War's Desolation

Somewhere near the high pines after midnight he was saying
goodbye.

"Still searching for the dream huh?" said Junebug with a sweet
smile.

"They never specified North or South."

"East or West" said Patrick laughing finishing Maddy's
thought. Looking like a couple of old farmers Patrick asked him
"Where you going?"

"To the country."

They were towling off getting out of the hot springs, the
peyote buttons beginning to kick in where a bonfire raged
behind them and they watched the fireworks.

"That's the thing about hippies; they're always going to the
country, even if they're already there" he said with a soft,
indiscernible accent.

"I'm leaving tomorrow."

Happy Home

Over the hills and far away on the outskirts of the city along
the county line where wild geese flew, kingfishers called and
the loveliest roses rambled up the gables and along the
hedges.

In his dreams he pictured happy gatherings round the fire long
ago. Inside a scene was unfolding. A painting on the wall had

blue green trees and a fairy ring. A river emerged from behind the trees with a fish jumping out of it. It was signed John B.

"Trip or treat!" Bells woke him up on a couch in his living room, surrounded by his children "Wake up! The time of dreaming dreams is over."

"It's getting dark again already?" Maddy woke up feeling lost. "I must be gettin old, I feel I haven't slept since the Conquest." A vase on the table held flowers from the garden. The houses on the street were lit up with the blue glow of televisions except one where the kids were playing a game, gwyddbwyll.

"I wrote you off as stoned years ago" his wife sighed as he roused from his slumber. "The kids want a story; and it better not be the same one you told me" she said busying off across the room.

"And waste this night remembering weather bitten bits of lore?" he called to her and a voice responded.

"Without a story this cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen!"

The radio was playing a funeral march by Purcell when the record started skipping and the DJ came on "I'll be here until midnight tonight. Come on by later, I'll still be here. Inappropriate things that's what you'll find at my house. Cats."

"Turn off that goddamn radio."

In the doorway to the kitchen his wife appeared, the best thing that he'd ever seen. "Tom's right here. Did I hear you crying?" she said to one of the children.

His wife handed him a plate and a cup of tea.

"If that ain't cuy I'll be durned." He quickly ate.

"No" said the child with a thumb in it's mouth and red eyes. "Go wake your sister, tell her it's time for bed." Sue was sprawled out on the floor in her footie pajamas, a wee bit of drool hanging from her mouth.

Setting the plate on the table he walked upstairs carrying one the children.

"Dad tell us the story!"

"Oh yes please?" said Martha.

"In 2012, a post-nuclear apocalyptic future-wasteland one man with thick blonde hair and a kilt..."

"That's not how it goes tell it right!" Maya exclaimed.

"It's hard to tell a story you haven't once heard told right."

Rain rattled hard and the winds hit heavy as he spoke "Listen to my story and I'll saw you no lies" said the man from timber country.

Sitting in the library a fire was already lit and the children sat on a large carpet.

"I'm gonna tell you a story a thousand verses long" he said getting lost in a familiar song. "Now where did I put it?" he said looking over a shelf of books. "Have I ever told you about the Marsh Kings Daughter or the Lonesome Lovers? From China to Peru... how about a faerie story?" he said searching the bookshelf. A manuscript marked 'Zaragossa' sat collecting dust.

"Ah here it is!" He pulled a book off the shelf. "Seldom we find things where we expect them. As in a dream and days of old a man will turn over half a library to find one book."

The pages had become stuck together from moisture and he pried it apart. "Let's see, let me find that passage..." and read aloud "Callisto's Kaleidoscope Calliope".

On the table was novel with the picture of a pear.

"Ye shall hear wonderful tales of adventure and of breathless risk and danger. I'm gonna tell it right if it takes me all night. Full many a wonder is told in stories of old of a river that flowed, warriors bold; wonders in legends and labours manifold." He told a tale of wonderous love and heros of high degree. "They battled o'er maiden from land of burgendy."

"What happened Poppa?" asked Quinn.

"We've canned our love for just such a night. Oh veni vidi vici! Gesundheit cup of chai! Memento mori the flibberty bip pizza pasta pie. Hokey pokey a penny a lump mind transport back in time" and it sounded a bit like a limeric.

"Let me tell ya bout a secret kept from all the rest and ships across the seas. Tell Luna Tea her sea is no more" and mom said "What a scene."

"But those were all just guesses. Huh Dad?" the little girl said affirmatively.

"It'll do you fine" he responded to his daughter.

"The best that's ever been" his wife said with a smirk as she carried the dishes off to the kitchen for him to clean in the morning. "Telling so many stories one can no longer tell what one knows and doesn't."

"Well there's plenty to remember" he replied.

"My ears are burning" said one of his daughters.

"It means someone is talking about you."

"What were they trying to do dad?" Maya was the only one still awake.

"Just trying to make both ends meet I guess, like everyone else."

"You know what type of pride goes before a fall yet still remains afterward?"

His child looked at him with wide eyes.

"A pride of lions! Rwarrr!" and tickling her put her off to bed.

When All Else Fails, Play Dead

Early rays of sunlight splattered across the room tearing him from his dream and a thunder cloud burst, pouring down. Looking up he saw no one around.

"It couldn't all have been a dream, if only there was some proof." Something he could hold onto.

He picked the book up off the floor and closing it placed it on the nightstand. A woman ran in from the misty garden and lay on him a rose saying "Levantarse huesos perezosos."

Chapter 24

